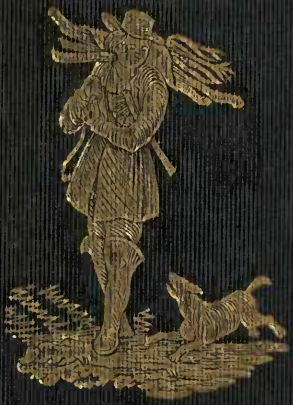

Robert Washington Oates

Henry Eliot Delmé Radcliffe

1847.

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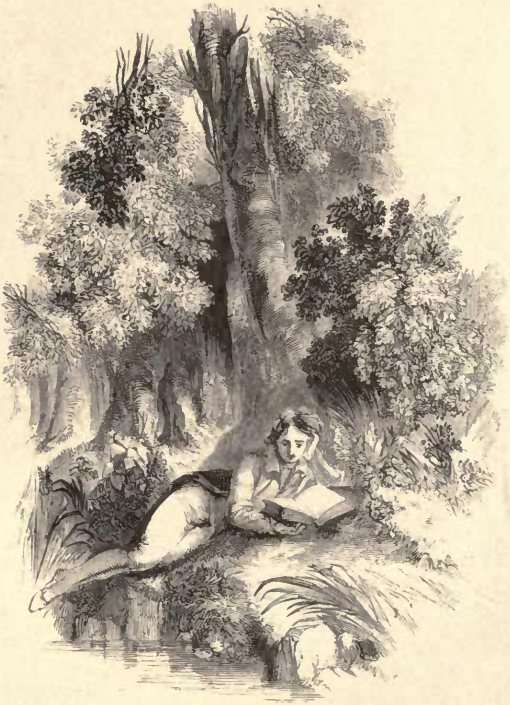
THE

BOOK OF THE MONTHS.



SUMMER.

Wasting in wood-paths the voluptuous hours.—
We pass out from the city's feverish hum
To find refreshment in the silent woods;
And Nature, that is beautiful and dumb,
Like a cool sleep upon the pulses broods.

N. P. WILLIS.

THE

BOOK OF THE MONTHS,

AND

Circle of the Seasons.

To me be Nature's volume broad display'd,
And to peruse its all-instructing page
My sole delight, as through the falling glooms
Pensive I stray.

THOMSON.

Nature's voice is sweet,
Wherever heard; her works, wherever seen,
Are might and beauty; to the mind and eye
She speaks of things that but with life can die.

ELLIOTT.

WITH TWENTY-EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS, ENGRAVED BY
J. O. SMITH AND W. LINTON,
FROM DRAWINGS BY WILLIAM HARVEY.

LONDON:
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MDCCCXLIV.

1844

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PREFACE.

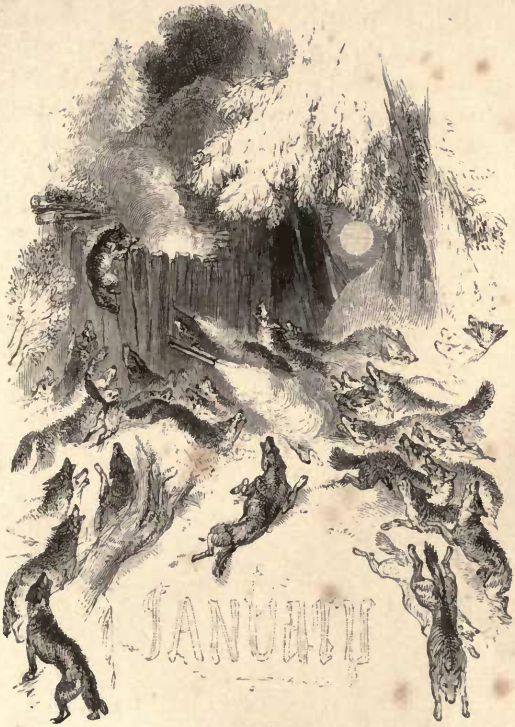
The little Work now presented to the public, makes no pretensions to originality. When the Editor undertook his self-imposed task, it was his intention simply to confine his views to the production of a new edition of Aiken's popular "Calendar of Nature." He soon, however, found materials so crowd upon him as to force him to abandon his original plan, and so extensive were the alterations and additions that it was thought expedient to give up the original title also.

In some respects the present Work has advantages not possessed by any of its predecessors. Its quotations from the poets are more ample, and its descriptions, being drawn from a variety of sources, have more general truth than could be hoped for, from the impressions of an individual mind. Being, moreover, of a strictly popular character, and intended for the perusal of the fair and the young, lists of systematic and scientific names have been altogether avoided. It has

been the Editor's wish to assist in the development of the observation of Nature, feeling, as it is happily put by Professor Wilson, that "our moral being owes deep obligations to all who assist us to study Nature aright, for it is high and rare knowledge to know and to have the full and true use of our eyes. Millions go to the grave in old age without ever having learned it; they were just beginning, perhaps, to acquire it, when they sighed to think that 'they who look out of the windows were darkened,' and that, while they had been instructed how to look, sad shadows had fallen on the whole face of Nature, and the time for these intuitions was gone for ever. But 'blessings are with them and eternal praise' who can discover, discern, and describe, the least as well as the greatest of Nature's works;—who can see as distinctly the finger of God in the little humming-bird, murmuring round a rose-bush, as in that of 'the star of Jove, so beautiful and large,' shining sole in heaven."

To the lover of Nature such a task as the Editor has here attempted will commend itself. Let such as care for none of these things listen to the feelings of one of our greatest modern philosophers as they are set forth in his eloquent "Salmonia," and learn from him what charms

are connected with the study of Nature. "How delightful is it in the early Spring, after the dull and tedious time of Winter, when the frosts disappear and the sunshine warms the earth and the waters, to wander forth by some clear stream, to see the leaf bursting from the purple bud, to scent the odours of the bank perfumed by the violet, and enamelled, as it were, with the primrose and the daisy; to wander upon the fresh turf, below the shade of trees, whose bright blossoms are filled with the music of the bee; and on the surface of the waters to view the gaudy flies, sparkling like animated gems in the sunbeams, whilst the bright and beautiful trout is watching them from below; to hear the twittering of the water-birds, who, alarmed at your approach, rapidly hide themselves beneath the flowers and leaves of the water-lily; and, as the season advances, to find all these objects changed for others of the same kind, but better and brighter, till the swallow and the trout contend, as it were, for the gaudy may-fly, and till, in pursuing your amusement in the calm of balmy evening, you are serenaded by the songs of the cheerful thrush, and the melodious nightingale, performing the offices of paternal love in thickets ornamented with the rose and the woodbine."



How changed, how awful is the grove,
Erst the gay haunts of youth and love!
Its tangling branches now are shorn
Of leafy honours, and upborne
By their close tops, the snow has made
Beneath, a strange and solemn shade.

THE

BOOK OF THE MONTHS.

JANUARY.

JANUARY is the first month of the year, and it is also the coldest. It derives its name from the heathen god, *Janus*, to whom the Romans dedicated this portion of time. Our Saxon ancestors gave it the name of *wolf-monath*, or wolf-month, because the wolves which anciently infested the British forests, impelled by hunger, at this season, descended from their accustomed haunts and attacked the domestic animals, and even man himself, when the inclemency of the weather had destroyed or put to flight their usual prey.

Happily such scenes are now unknown in Britain. Thomson describes the dire descent of a troop of such monsters from

The shining Alps,
And wavy Appennines, and Pyrenees,
—— By wintry famine roused:
Cruel as death, and hungry as the grave,
Burning for blood!—bony, and gaunt, and grim!
Assembling wolves in raging troops descend;
And, pouring o'er the country, bear along,
Keen as the north-wind sweeps the glossy snow.
All is their prize.—
Rapacious, at the mother's throat they fly,
And tear the screaming infant from her breast,
E'en beauty, force divine! at whose bright glance
The generous lion stands in soften'd gaze,
Here bleeds, a hapless, undistinguish'd prey.

In the illuminated calendars prefixed to old Romish missals, January is frequently represented as a man carrying faggots, or a woodman's axe, shivering and blowing his fingers. Modern artists and poets represent winter as a feeble old man—a type of the "pale descending year." Against this idea a gifted female writer of our own day thus warmly protests:—

Talk not of Winter as a dotard old!
Grey-haired and feeble, palsied every limb,
"A wither'd branch his sceptre:"—'tis a whim
He well may laugh to scorn; a warrior bold
Girded with strength is he! Asleep—awake—
He is all energy to ear and sight;
He bids the winds go forth, and forests quake,
Like flowers before gay Summer's fresh'ning gale;
He doth unchain the floods, and, in their might,
Adown the hills they rush, and through the vale,
With deafening clamour, till they reach the main.

MRS. HEY.

In January the increasing influence of the sun is scarcely felt in our climate. The smaller rivers and ponds are frozen over, and sometimes a strong and sudden frost converts the gliding streams into blocks of solid ice—

An icy gale, oft shifting o'er the pool
Breathes a blue film, and in its mid career
Arrests the bickering storm.
Loud rings the frozen earth, and hard reflects
A double noise; while, at his evening watch,
The village dog deters the nightly thief;
The heifer lows; the distant waterfall
Swells in the breeze; and with the hasty tread
Of traveller, the hollow-sounding plain
Shakes from afar.

It freezes on,
Till Morn, late rising o'er the drooping world,
Lifts her pale eye, unjoyous. Then appears
The various labour of the silent Night:
Prone from the dripping eave, and dumb cascade,
Whose idle torrents only seem to roar;
The pendent icicle, the frost-work fair,
Where transient hues and fancied figures rise;
Wide-spouted o'er the hill, the frozen brook,
A livid tract, cold gleaming on the morn.

THOMSON.

Occasionally a deep fall of snow conceals the face of Nature, and nothing is to be seen but masses of white. The high roads are rendered impassable, and sometimes internal communication is altogether interrupted. The beauty of a country covered with new-fallen snow is very striking—

The cherish'd fields
Put on their winter-robe of purest white.
'Tis brightness all; save where the new snow melts
Along the mazy current. Low the woods
Bow their hoar head; and, ere the languid Sun,
Faint from the west, emits his evening ray,
Earth's universal face, deep hid, and chill,
Is one wild dazzling waste, that buries wide
The works of man.

THOMSON.

Cowper finely completes this picture—

The streams are lost amid the splendid blank,
O'erwhelming all distinction. On the flood,
Indurated and fix'd, the snowy weight
Lies undissolved; while silently beneath,
And unperceived, the current steals away.
Not so where, scornful of a check, it leaps
The mill-dam, dashes on the restless wheel,
And wantons in the pebbly gulf below:
No frost can bind it there; its utmost force
Can but arrest the light and smoky mist,
That in its fall the liquid sheet throws wide.
And see where it has hung the embroider'd banks
With forms so various that no powers of art,
The pencil or the pen, may trace the scene!
Here glittering turrets rise, upbearing high
(Fantastic misarrangement!) on the roof
Large growth of what may seem the sparkling trees
And shrubs of fairy land. The crystal drops,
That trickle down the branches, fast congeal'd,
Shoot into pillars of pellucid length,
And prop the pile they but adorn'd before.
Here grotto within grotto safe defies
The sunbeam; there, emboss'd and fretted wild,
The growing wonder takes a thousand shapes
Capricious, in which fancy seeks in vain
The likeness of some object seen before.
Thus Nature works as if to mock at Art,
And in defiance of her rival powers;

By these fortuitous and random strokes
Performing such inimitable feats
As she, with all her rules, can never reach.

THE TASK.

Not the least strikingly beautiful of the appearances of the season is occasioned by the hoar-frost, which clothes the trees in crystals, which sparkle like the most brilliant gems. Well might Howitt exclaim, as he gazed on the gorgeous effects of its incomparable loveliness,

What dream of beauty ever equalled this!
What visions of my boyhood do I miss,
That are not here restored! All splendours pure,
All loveliness, all graces that allure;
Shapes that amaze; a Paradise that is—
Yet was not—will not in few moments be:
Glory from nakedness, that playfully
Mimics with passing life each summer boon;
Clothing the ground, replenishing the tree,
Weaving arch, bower, and delicate festoon,
Still as a dream—and, like a dream, to flee!

W. HOWITT.

The inclemency of the season is shown by its effects on animals, particularly on the numerous tribes of birds. As the cold advances, they collect in flocks, quit their retreats, and, rendered

bold by want, approach the habitations of man. Larks and other small birds shelter themselves in the warm stubble. Sparrows, yellow-hammers, and chaffinches, crowd into the farmyards, and attend the barn-doors, to pick their scanty fare from the chaff and straw—

> One alone,
> The Redbreast, sacred to the household gods,
> Wisely regardful of the embroiling sky,
> In joyless fields and thorny thickets leaves
> His shivering mates, and pays to trusted man
> His annual visit. Half-afraid, he first
> Against the window beats; then brisk alights
> On the warm hearth; then, hopping o'er the floor,
> Eyes all the smiling family askance,
> And pecks, and starts, and wonders where he is;
> Till, more familiar grown, the table-crumbs
> Attract his tender feet.
>
> THOMSON.

Ebenezer Elliott, the corn-law rhymer, has a couple of lines, in one of his larger poems, exquisitely expressive of the appearance and manners of this universal favourite—

> Thou little, dusky, crimson-bosom'd bird,
> Starting, but not in fear, from tree to tree!

Fieldfares and thrushes in large flocks descend from the tops of trees, and frequent the warm manured fields in the neighbourhood of towns. Snipes, woodcocks, wild-ducks, and other water-fowl, are forced from the frozen marshes, and obliged to seek their food about the rapid currents of streams which are yet unfrozen. As the cold grows more intense, various kinds of sea-fowl quit the bleak open shores, and come up the rivers, where they offer an unusual prey to the fowler. Cowper finely paints the sufferings of the feathered tribes during the inclemency of winter—

How find the myriads that in summer cheer
The hills and valleys with their ceaseless songs,
Due sustenance, or where subsist they now?
Earth yields them nought; the imprison'd worm is safe
Beneath the frozen clod; all seeds of herbs
Lie cover'd close; and berry-bearing thorns
That feed the thrush (whatever some suppose),
Afford the smaller minstrels no supply.
The long-protracted rigour of the year
Thins all their numerous flocks. In chinks and holes
Ten thousand seek an unmolested end,
As instinct prompts; self-buried there they die.
The very rooks and daws forsake the fields,

Where neither grub, nor root, nor earth-nut now
Repays their labour more; and perch'd aloft,
By the wayside, or stalk amid the path,
Lean pensioners upon the traveller's track.

THE TASK.

And Burns, with true poetic sympathy for the sufferings of all created things, while listening to the stormy terrors of a winter's night, thus apostrophizes the feathered songsters of the grove—

Ilk happing bird, wee helpless thing,
That in the merry months o' spring
Delighted me to hear thee sing,
What comes o' thee?
Whare wilt thou cow'r thy chittering wing,
An' close thy e'e!

Shakspeare, perhaps, suggested to the northern poet this feeling apostrophe—

Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
That bide the pelting of the pitiless storm!
How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides
Your loop'd and window'd raggedness defend you
From seasons such as these!

KING LEAR.

The wild quadrupeds, also, are driven from their accustomed haunts. Hares enter the gar-

dens to browse on the cultivated vegetables; and the hen-roosts are pillaged by foxes, polecats, and other small beasts of prey.

Yet amid all these indications of the severity of the season, says the amiable Gilbert White, there are pleasing circumstances which sometimes occur; such as the wild song of the missel-thrush, occasionally ushering in the year. This is our most early woodland songster, which, sitting in the top of some tall tree, in showery weather, exerts his throat in loud uninterrupted strains, and is called by our country people the storm-cock. In this month also the wren sings very melodiously, and, availing himself of the food and shelter that he derives from stables and outhouses, appears wonderfully alert and vigorous.

As to insects they by no means lie benumbed through the winter, for even in this month house-crickets, spiders, woodlice, and the nimble shining creatures that frequent sugar cupboards, are stirring and abroad; gnats (*empedes et tipulæ*) are seen frisking whenever a mild day encourages them; nor are earth-worms afraid to extend themselves on the turf in warm foggy nights.

The author of "The Sabbath" thus vividly

paints the appearance of winter, and its effects upon the "rural populace."

All out-door work
Now stands; the wagoner, with wisp-wound feet,
And wheelspokes almost fill'd, his destined stage
Scarcely can gain. O'er hill, and vale, and wood,
Sweeps the snow-pinion'd blast, and all things veils,
In white array, disguising to the view
Objects well known, now faintly recognised;
One colour clothes the mountain and the plain,
Save where the feathery flakes melt as they fall
Upon the deep blue stream, or scowling lake,
Or where some beetling rock o'erjutting hangs
Above the vaulty precipice's cove.
Formless, the pointed cairn now scarce o'ertops
The level dreary waste; and coppice woods,
Diminish'd of their height, like bushes seem.
With stooping heads, turn'd from the storm, the flocks
Onward still urged by man and dog, escape
The smothering drift; while, skulking at a side,
Is seen the fox, with close down-folded tail,
Watching his time to seize a straggling prey;
Or, from some lofty crag, he ominous howls,
And makes approaching night more dismal fall.

GRAHAME.

The domestic cattle now require all the care and protection of the farmer. Cows, with much

ado, scratch up a few mouthfuls of grass; but for their chief subsistence they must depend upon the hay and other provisions of the farm-yard—

The verdure of the plain lies buried deep
Beneath the dazzling deluge; and the bents
And coarser grass upspearing o'er the rest,
Of late unsightly and unseen, now shine
Conspicuous, and in bright apparel clad,
And fledged with icy feathers, nod superb.
The cattle mourn in corners, where the fence
Screens them, and seem half petrify'd to sleep
In unrecumbent sadness. There they wait
Their wonted fodder, not like hung'ring man
Fretful if unsupplied; but silent, meek,
And patient of the slow-paced swain's delay.

COWPER.

Early lambs and calves are kept within doors, and tended with as much care as the farmer's own children.

Now, shepherds, to your helpless charge be kind;
Baffle the raging year, and fill their pens
With food at will; lodge them below the storm,
And watch them strict; for, from the bellowing east,
In this dire season, oft the whirlwinds wing
Sweeps up the burthen of whole wint'ry plains
At one wide waft, and o'er the hapless flocks,
Hid in the hollow of two neighbouring hills,

The billowy tempest whelms; 'till upward urg'd
The valley to a shining mountain swells,
Tipt with a wreath high-curling in the sky.

THOMSON.

The flocks are not, however, the only sufferers in this dire season. In the northern parts of the island, where they are spread over large tracts of open and exposed country, the care of the shepherd is required to direct them to the situations where they may be least liable to be overwhelmed by the snow, and where they are most likely to obtain access to the herbage on which they feed. In such occupations it not unfrequently happens that the shepherds themselves are overcome by the storm. A continuation of the passage from Thomson, just quoted, furnishes a touching scene of this kind, probably, as his latest and best biographer remarks, the description of some real catastrophe:—

As thus the snows arise, and, foul and fierce,
All winter drives along the darken'd air,
In his own loose-revolving fields the swain
Disaster'd stands, sees other hills ascend,
Of unknown joyless brow; and other scenes,
Of horrid prospect, shag the trackless plain:

Nor finds the river, nor the forest, hid
Beneath the formless wild; but wanders on
From hill to dale, still more and more astray.
In vain for him the officious wife prepares,
The fire fair-blazing and the vestment warm;
In vain his little children, peeping out
Into the mingling storm, demand their sire,
With tears of artless innocence. Alas!
Nor wife, nor children, more shall he behold,
Nor friends nor sacred home. On every nerve
The deadly winter seizes; shuts up sense;
And o'er his inmost vitals creeping cold,
Lays him along the snows, a stiffen'd corse,
Stretch'd out and bleaching in the northern blast.

The plants at this season are provided by Nature with a kind of winter-quarters, which secure them from the effects of cold. Those called herbaceous, which die down to the root every autumn, are now safely concealed under ground, preparing their new shoots to burst forth when the earth is softened by spring. Shrubs and trees, which are exposed to the open air, have all their soft and tender parts closely wrapt up in buds, which, by their firmness, resist the force of frost. If one of these buds be carefully opened, it is found to consist of young leaves rolled together, within which are even all the

blossoms in miniature, which are afterwards to adorn the spring. The leaves of the woodbine appear just ready to expand by the end of the month; the flowers of the mezereon and snow-drop seem on the point of blowing; and the catkin, or male flower-bunch of the hazel, begins to unfold.

This gloomy month is, however, not altogether without flowers, for now the *Helleborus fœtidus*, and various mosses blossom in our woods, and fructification goes on in the instance of ivy-berries, which continue to swell whenever the weather will give them the least respite. Among the flowers which may, notwithstanding the inclemency of the season, be found by the diligent botanist, are the red dead-nettle, the "never-dying" daisy, and the groundsel, which held a distinguished place in the consideration of the old herbalists. The prickly furze, too, enlivens way-sides and waste places with its bright yellow flowers.

One of the most remarkable products of the season are the white berries of the mistletoe. This plant which, since the time of the Druids, has borne so large a share in the decoration of our

domestic hearths, during the festival of Christmas, is chiefly remarkable for the peculiarity of its growth—being always found adhering to, and deriving its nourishment from the juice of some tree, and never attached to the earth. It flowers early in the year, but its berries do not make their appearance till December. They are eagerly fed on by the thrushes, fieldfares, redwings, and birds of this family. The plant is principally found attached to the apple-tree, but infests many of the inhabitants of the British forests. It is least frequently found on the oak—on which its occurrence is so rare as to be reckoned a curiosity by botanists. The mistletoe seems to be confined to certain localities. It abounds in the orchards of Hereford, Worcester, and Gloucester, is rarely found in the north of England, and in Scotland is said to be confined to one locality only.

During the severity of the frost, little work can be done out of doors by the husbandman. As soon as it sets in, he takes the opportunity of the hardness of the ground to draw manure to his fields. He lops and cuts timber, and mends thorn hedges. When the roads become smooth from the frozen snow, he takes his team and carries hay

and corn to market, or brings coals for himself and neighbours. The barn resounds with the flail, by the use of which the labourer is enabled to defy the cold weather.

In towns the poor are pinched for fuel and food, and charity is peculiarly called for at this comfortless time of the year. Many trades are at a stand during the severity of the frost. Rivers and canals being frozen up, watermen and bargemen are without employment. The harbours in this island, however, are never locked up by the ice, as they are for many months in the northern parts of Europe.

Occasionally, however, we enjoy, even in January, days which we, for the moment, regard as of exceeding beauty because, perhaps, of the contrast between them and seasonable weather amidst which they occur. The sun shines bright and warm, the gnat is tempted forth from its secret dormitory, and we are apt to forget that the winter is not yet "past and gone." The morrow recals us to a full sense of our position in the scale of the seasons—the sky is black and threatening, or a pelting storm of snow and sleet so alters the fair face of nature, that we are glad

once more to take refuge from her frowns, amid the delights of the social hearth.

The lover of nature, however, will not be altogether deterred from seeking amusement out of doors, even by the inclemency of the season. As a pleasing and observant writer has remarked—the man is infinitely mistaken who supposes that there is nothing worth seeing in winter time, out of doors, because the sun is not warm, and the streets are muddy. Let him, by dint of good exercise, get out of the streets, and he will find enough. In the warm neighbourhood of towns he may still watch the fieldfares, thrushes, and blackbirds; the tit-mouse seeking its food through the straw thatch; the redwings, fieldfares, skylarks, and titlarks upon the same errand, over the wet meadows; the sparrows, yellow-hammers, and chaffinches still beautiful, though mute, gleaning from the straw and chaff in farmyards; and the ring-dove, always poetical, coming from her meal on the ivy-berries. About rapid streams he may see the various habits and movements of herons, woodcocks, wild ducks, and other water-fowl, which are obliged to quit the frozen marshes to seek their food there: and in his walks he will be

gratified by the cheerful movements, and, perhaps, charmed by the song of the redbreast flitting about the cottage door.

The amusements of sliding, skating, and other pastimes on the ice, give life to this dreary season; but our frosts are not continued and steady enough to afford us such a share of these diversions as some other nations enjoy.

The opening and the close of the year each affords topics and occasions for mournful meditation. One of the most distinguished female writers of our time has some fine reflections appertaining to the season, in a poem entitled "Stanzas on the New Year."

I stood between the meeting years,
  The coming and the past;
And I ask'd of the future one—
  Wilt thou be like the last?

The same in many a sleepless night,
  In many an anxious day?
Thank Heaven! I have no Prophet's eye,
  To look upon thy way!

For sorrow like a phantom sits,
  Upon the last year's close:
How much of grief, how much of ill,
  In its dark breast repose!

Shadows of faded hopes flit by,
  And ghosts of pleasures fled:
How have they chang'd from what they were!
  Cold, colourless, and dead.

I think on many a wasted hour,
  And sicken o'er the void;
And many darker are behind,
  On worse than nought employ'd.

Oh, vanity! alas, my heart!
  How widely hast thou stray'd;
And misused every golden gift,
  For better purpose made!

I think on many a once-loved friend,
  As nothing to me now;
And what can mark the lapse of time
  As does an alter'd brow?

Perhaps 'twas but a careless word
  That sever'd friendship's chain;
And angry pride stands by each gap,
  Lest they unite again.

Less sad, albeit more terrible,
  To think upon the dead,
Who, quiet in the lonely grave,
  Lay down their weary head.

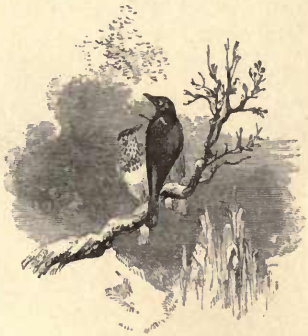
For faith, and hope, and peace, and trust,
  Are with their happier lot;
Though broken is their bond of love,
  At least *we* broke it not.

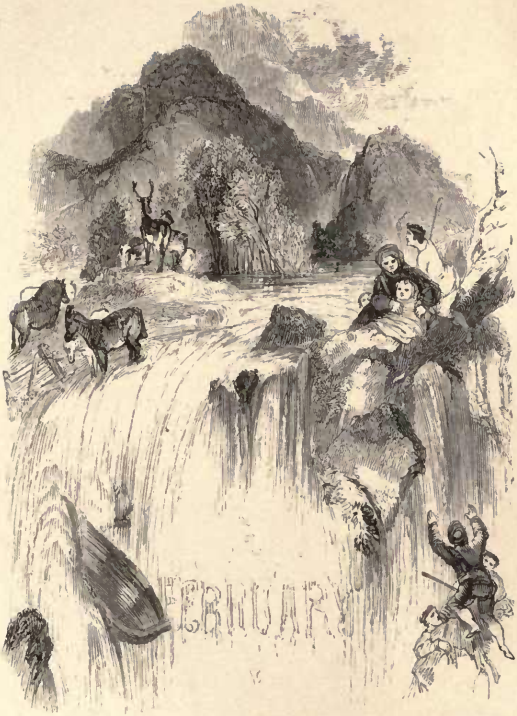
Thus thinking of the meeting years,
The coming and the past;
I needs must ask the future one,
Wilt thou be like the last?

There came a sound, but not of speech,
That to my thought replied,—
"Misery is the marriage-gift
That waits a mortal bride:

"But lift thine hopes from this base earth,
This waste of worldly care,
And wed thy faith to yon bright sky,
For happiness dwells there."

L. E. L.





Wet February next comes by,
With chill, damp earth, and dripping sky;
But heart cheer up! the days speed on,
Winds blow, sun shines, and thaws are gone,
And in the garden may be seen
Up-springing flowers and buddings green.

W. Howitt.

FEBRUARY.

February was called by our Saxon ancestors *Sprout-kele*, because, says Verstegan, the coleworth, which was the chief article of winter sustenance of the husbandman, in this month began to yield out wholesome young sprouts. Its modern appellation it derives from the *Februalia* or expiatory sacrifices which the Romans were wont to offer at this season.

The earlier part of this month may still be reckoned Winter; though the cold generally begins to abate. The days are now sensibly lengthened; and the sun has power enough gradually to melt the snow and ice. Sometimes a sudden thaw comes on with a south wind and rain, which all at once dissolves the snow. Torrents of water then descend from the hills; every little

brook and rill is swelled to a large stream; and the ice is swept away with great violence from the rivers. It is from this peculiarity that this month of thaws is by the country-people called by the expressive name of "February fill-dike."

Muttering, the winds at eve, with blunted point,
Blow hollow-blustering from the south. Subdued,
The frost resolves into a trickling thaw.
Spotted the mountains shine; loose sleet descends,
And floods the country round. The rivers swell,
Of bonds impatient. Sudden from the hills,
O'er rocks and woods, in broad brown cataracts,
A thousand snow-fed torrents shoot at once;
And where they rush, the wide resounding plain
Is left one slimy waste. THOMSON.

The frost, however, returns for a time; the fresh snow falls, often in great quantities; and thus the weather alternately changes during most part of this month. Its general character, however, is moist, raw, and disagreeable. "If February," remarks Leigh Hunt, "were not the precursor of Spring, it would be the least pleasant season of the year, November not excepted. The thaws now take place, and a clammy mixture of moisture and cold succeeds, which is the most disagreeable of winter sensations."

Various signs of returning Spring—

——— songful Spring,
Whose looks are melody,

ELLIOTT.

occur at different times in February. The wood-lark, one of the earliest and sweetest songsters, often begins his note at the very entrance of the month. Not long after, rooks begin to pair. The blackbird, thrush, and chaffinch then add to the early music of the groves. The marsh titmouse exerts his two harsh quaint notes, which some compare to the whetting of a saw; and the great black-headed titmouse distinguishes himself by three cheerful notes. The hedge-sparrow and yellow-hammer, accompanied sometimes by the sky-lark, also essay to sing. Ravens pair and build, a hardy race that live, as it were, by accident, being supported by the casual deaths of maimed or distempered cattle. The blue nuthatch may be also seen tapping briskly on the boughs, scaling off the encrusted lichens, and loudly chirping his delight as he feeds on the insects which he has thus dislodged.

Near the close of the month, partridges begin to couple and repair the ravages committed by

the sportsman on this devoted species during the Autumn and Winter.

Moles go to work in throwing up their hillocks as soon as the earth is softened, and make preparations for their summer campaign, constructing for themselves *runs* in various directions, to enable them to escape in case of danger; and also as a means of procuring their food. These runs communicate with one another, and unite at one point; at this centre the female establishes her head-quarters, and forms a seperate habitation for her young, taking care that both shall be on a higher level than the runs, and, as nearly as possible, even with the ground, and any moisture that may penetrate is carried off by the runs. This dormitory, if it may be so styled, is generally placed at the foot of a wall or near a hedge or a tree, where it has less chance of being broken in. When so placed, no external embankment gives token of its presence; but when the soil is light, a large heap of earth is generally thrown over it. Being susceptible of the slightest noise or vibration of the earth, the mole, in case of surprise, at once betakes itself to its safety runs. Le Court, a French naturalist, records some very curious ex-

periments as to the sight of moles, as well as to the speed at which they can travel along these underground galleries. They are very voracious, and die of hunger if kept without food for twelve hours.

Many plants emerge from under ground in February, but few flowers as yet adorn the fields or gardens, notwithstanding the boast of an old poet, that

> The flowers which cold in prison kept,
> Now laugh the frost to scorn.
>
> RICHARD EDWARDS, 1523.

Snowdrops, "fair maids of February," as they are called, are generally fully opened from the beginning of the month, often peeping out from the midst of the snow. The hardy laurustinus puts forth its clusters of white blossoms, the alder-tree discloses its flower-buds, and the catkins of the hazel become very conspicuous in the hedges. Young leaves are budding on the gooseberry and currant bushes about the end of the month; and the winter aconite, with its—

> Green leaf furling round its cup of gold,
>
> CLARE.

gives life and animation to the otherwise dark and desolate border.

Clare has some fine verses descriptive of the influence of the dawning Spring :—

The snow has left the cottage top;
The thatch-moss grows in brighter green;
And eaves in quick succession drop,
Where grinning icicles have been;
Pit-patting with a pleasant noise,
In tubs set by the cottage door;
While ducks and geese, with happy joys,
Plunge in the yard pond brimming o'er.

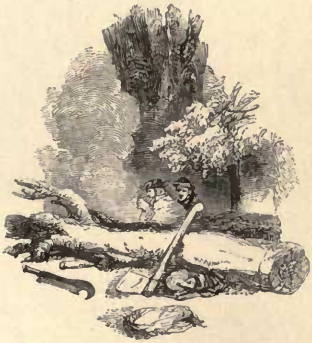
The sun peeps through the window-pane;
Which children mark with laughing eye:
And in the wet street steal again,
To tell each other Spring is nigh:
Then, as young Hope the past recals,
In playing groups they often draw,
To build beside the sunny walls
Their spring-time huts of sticks or straw.

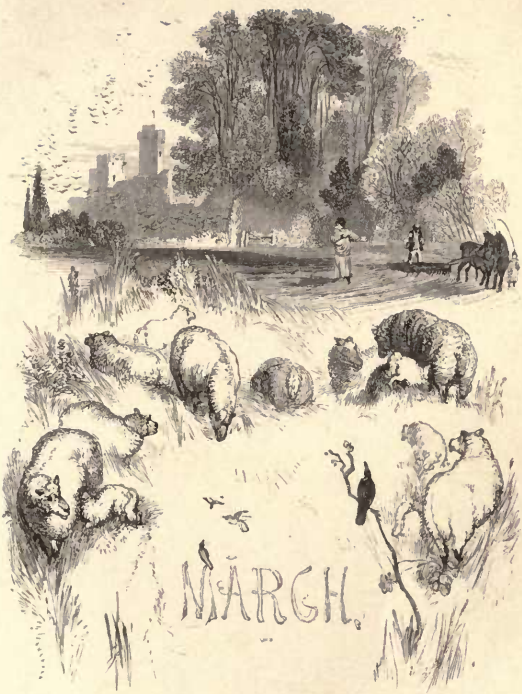
And oft in pleasure's dreams they hie
Round homesteads by the village side,
Scratching the hedgerow mosses by,
Where painted pooty-shells abide;
Mistaking oft the ivy spray
For leaves that come with budding Spring,
And wondering, in their search for play,
Why birds delay to build and sing.

The mavis-thrush with wild delight
Upon the orchard's dripping tree,

Mutters to see the day so bright,
    Fragments of young Hope's poesy:
And oft Dame stops her buzzling wheel
    To hear the Robin's note once more,
Who tootles while he pecks his meal
    From sweetbriar hips beside the door.

Meanwhile, the farmer is impatient to begin his work in the fields. He ploughs up his fallows; sows beans and peas, rye and spring-wheat; sets early potatoes; drains his wet land; dresses and repairs hedges; lops trees, and plants those kinds which love a wet soil, as poplars and willows.





Then March, the prophetess, by storms inspired,
  Gazes in rapture on the troubled sky;
And now in headlong fury madly fired
  She bids the hail-storm boil and hurry by,
Yet 'neath the blackest cloud the sunbeams fling
Their cheering promise of returning Spring.

JOHN CLARE.

MARCH.

SPENSER finely characterizes this month—

> Sturdy March with brows full sternly bent
> And armed strongly;

yet he pictures it, as it advances, scattering blessings around, and strewing the earth with flowers. Such is, in reality, the progress of the season. In the early days of the month—

> Winter still lingering on the verge of Spring,
> Retires reluctant and, from time to time,
> Looks back.
>
> THOMSON.

As it proceeds, however—

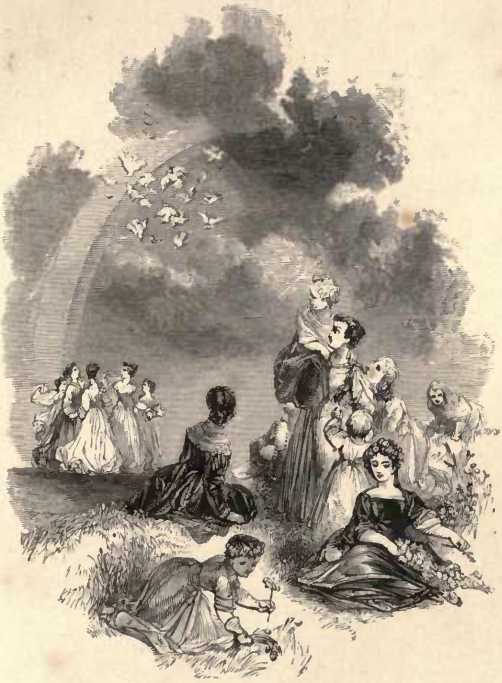
> The splendid raiment of the spring peeps forth
> Her universal green, and the clear sky
> Delight still more and more the gazing eye,
>
> BLOOMFIELD.

and all is joy and gladness. The lark is carolling

high in the clear blue vault of heaven; the notes of the woodlark resound through the yet leafless grove; the blackbird and the thrush are again heard from their lofty perch on the branch of some tall tree. The waters are dancing in the sunshine, and everything seems instinct with renewed life.

A quaint old writer says, "the moneth of March was called by our Saxon ancestors, *Lenet-monath*, that is, according to our new orthography, *Length-moneth*, because the days did then first begin in length to exceed the nights. And this moneth being by our ancestors so called, when they received Christianity, and, consequently, therewith the annual Christian custome of fasting, they called their chief season of fasting, the fast of *Lenet*, because of the *Lenet-monath*, whereon most part of this fasting always fell, and hereof it cometh that we now call it Lent." According to other etymologists, Lenet, or Lent, means Spring; hence March was literally the Spring-month.

Spring, most delightful of seasons, how beautifully have thy charms been celebrated in undying song, by bards of old from the very dawn of our literature. Such names as these canst thou boast



SPRING.

— the Spring and play-time of the year,
That calls the unwonted villager abroad,
With all her little ones, a sportive train,
To gather king-cups in the yellow mead,
And prink their hair with daisies.

COWPER.

among thy worshippers—Chaucer, Spenser, Herrick, Ben Jonson, Shakspeare—but why should we attempt to enumerate—and each speaking of thy beauties out of the fulness of his heart. How graphically does the author of the "Fairie Queene" marshal thee forth in the noble march of the Seasons:—

First lusty Spring all dight in leaves of floures
That freshly budded, and new bloosmes did beare,
In which a thousand birds had built their bowres
That swetely sung to call forth paramoures:
And in his hand a javelin he did beare,
And on his head (as fit for warlike stoures)
A guilt-engraven morion he did weare,
That as some did him love, so others did him feare.

And a poet of our own day thus finely apostrophizes this poet-loved season—

Dear as the dove whose wafting wing
The green leaf ransom'd from the main,
Thy genial glow, returning Spring!
Comes to our shores again;
For thou hast been a wanderer long,
On many a fair and foreign strand,
In balm and beauty, sun and song,
Passing from land to land.

O'er vine-clad hills and classic plains
Of glowing climes beyond the deep,
And by the dim and mouldering fanes,
Where the dead Cæsars sleep;
And o'er Sierras brightly blue
Where rest our country's fallen brave,
Smiling through thy sweet tears to strew
Flower-offerings o'er each grave.

Thou bring'st the blossom to the bee,
To earth a robe of emerald dye,
The leafet to the naked tree,
And rainbows to the sky;
I feel thy blest benign control,
The pulses of my youth restore,
Opening the springs of sense and soul
To love and joy once more.

JOHN MALCOLM.

The great operations of Nature during this month seem to be, to dry up the superabundant moisture of February, thereby preventing the roots and seeds from rotting in the earth; and gradually to bring forward the process of evolution in the swelling buds, whilst, at the same time, by the wholesome severity of chilling blasts, they are kept from a premature disclosure, which would expose their tender contents to injury from the yet

unconfirmed season. This effect is beautifully touched upon in a simile of Shakspeare's—

> And like the tyrannous breathing of the north,
> Checks all our buds from blowing.

This seeming tyranny, however, is to be regarded as the most useful discipline; and those years generally prove most fruitful in which the pleasing appearances of Spring are the latest.

The sun has now acquired so much power, that, on a clear day, we often feel all the genial influence of Spring, though the naked shrubs and trees still give the landscape the comfortless appearance of Winter—

> There is a vernal freshness in the air
> A breaking in the sky full of sweet promise,
> That the tardy Spring, capricious as she is,
> And chary of her favours, will, ere long,
> Smile on us in her beauty, and call forth
> From slumber long and deep each living thing.
> I know it by this warm delicious breeze,
> Balmy, yet fresh, the very soul of health—
> Of health, of hope, of joy; by these bright beams,
> And yonder azure heavens, I know it well.
> Soon the pent blossom in the naked spray,
> Train'd to the sunny wall, shall own her power,
> And ope its leaves, tinged like an ocean shell:

Soon shall each bank which fronts the southern sky,
And tangled copse, and quiet shelter'd nook,
Be gemm'd with countless flowers—earth's living stars.

RECOLLECTIONS OF THE LAKES.

Mild pleasant weather in March is seldom, however, of long duration,

As yet the trembling year is unconfirm'd,
And Winter oft at eve resumes the breeze,
Chills the pale morn, and bids his driving sleets
Deform the day delightless.

THOMSON.

As soon as a few dry days have made the land fit for working, the farmer goes to the plough; and, if the fair weather continues, proceeds to sowing oats and barley; though this business is seldom finished till the next month. The importance of a dry season for getting the seed early and favourably into the ground is expressed in the old proverb—"A peck of March dust is worth a king's ransom."

"A strange commotion," observes a writer on the months, "may be seen and heard at this season among the winged creatures, portending momentous matters. The lark is high up in the cold air before daylight, and his chosen mistress

is listening to him among the dank grass, with the dew still upon her unshaken wing. The robin, too, has left off, for a brief season, his low, plaintive piping, which, it must be confessed, was poured forth for his own exclusive satisfaction, and reckoning on his spruce looks and sparkling eyes, issues his quick peremptory love-call, in a somewhat ungallant and husband-like manner. The sparrows who have lately been skulking silently about, from tree to tree, with ruffled plumes and drooping wings, now spruce themselves up, till they do not look half their former size, and if it were not pairing time, one might fancy, there was more of war than of love in their noisy squabblings."

The mellow note of the throstle, who sings perched on the naked bough of some lofty tree, is heard, as we have already noted, from the beginning of the month, and the ring-dove coos in the woods. The rookery is all in motion—

> The sable tenants of five hundred years,
> That on the high tops of yon aged elms,
> Pour their hoarse music on the lonely ear,

are now busily engaged with the pleasing labour

of building and repairing nests; and highly amusing it is to observe the tricks and artifices of the thievish tribe—some to defend, and others to plunder, the materials of their new habitations. These birds are accused of doing much injury to the farmer, by plucking up the young corn and other springing vegetables; but some think this mischief fully repaid by their diligence in picking up the grubs of various insects, which, if suffered to grow to maturity, would occasion much greater damage. For this purpose, they are frequently seen following the plough, or settling in flocks on newly turned-up lands.

The same increasing warmth that calls our summer tribes into life, warns the winter-birds to retire. The woodcocks which usually visit us in a Spring flight, now pair and withdraw. The fieldfares cluster on trees and essay to sing, before they take their departure, while our home-bred flocking birds—the larks, the chaffinches, the yellow-hammer, and the linnets—begin to separate and dissolve their winter associations. Among other indications of the advancing season—

> New born lambs in rustic dance
> Frisking ply their feeble feet,

Forgetful of their wintry trance
The birds his presence greet;
But chief the skylark warbles high
His trembling thrilling ecstacy,
And lessening from the dazzled sight,
Melts into air and liquid light.

GRAY.

"There are frequently mornings in March," says a correspondent of "Hone's Every Day Book," who thus pleasantly "babbles o' green fields" and their charms during this earliest of the Spring months, "when a lover of nature may enjoy in a stroll sensations not to be exceeded, or, perhaps, equalled by anything which the full glory of summer can awaken. Mornings, which tempt us to cast the memory of winter, or the fear of its recurrence out of our thoughts. The air is mild and balmy, with, now and then, a cool gush, by no means unpleasant, but, on the contrary, contributing towards that cheering and peculiar feeling which we experience only in Spring. The sky is clear, the sun flings abroad, not only a gladdening splendour, but an almost summer glow. The world seems suddenly aroused to hope and enjoyment. The fields are assuming a vernal greenness, the buds are swelling in the hedges, the

banks are displaying, amidst the brown remains of last year's vegetation, the luxuriant weeds of this. There are arums, ground-ivy, chervil, the glaucous leaves, and burnished flowers of the pilewort—

> The first gilt thing,
> Which wears the trembling pearls of Spring;

and many other fresh and early bursts of greenery. All unexpectedly, too, in some embowered lane, you are arrested by the delicious odour of violets—those sweetest of Flora's children, which have furnished so many allusions to the poets, and which are not yet exhausted; they are like true friends, we do not know half their sweetness till they have felt the sunshine of our kindness; and again, they are like the pleasures of our childhood, the earliest and the most beautiful. Now, however, they are to be seen in all their glory—blue and white—modestly peering through their thickly clustering leaves. The lark is carolling in the blue fields of air, the blackbird and thrush are again shouting and replying to each other from the tops of the highest trees. As you pass cottages, they have caught the happy infection. There are windows thrown open, and doors standing a-jar. The inhabitants are in their gar-

dens, some cleaning away rubbish, some turning up the light and fresh smelling soil, amongst the tufts of snowdrops, and rows of glowing yellow crocuses, which everywhere abound; and the children, ten to one, are busy peeping into the first birds'-nests of the season—the hedge-sparrow's, with its four blue eggs, snugly, but unwisely, built in the pile of old pea-rods.

"In the fields, the labourers are plashing and trimming the hedges, and in all directions are teams at plough. You smell the wholesome, and, we may truly say, aromatic soil, as it is turned up to the sun, brown and rich, the whole country over. It is delightful as you pass along deep hollow lanes, or are hidden in copses, to hear the tinkling gears of the horses, and the clear voices of the lads calling to them. It is not less pleasant to catch the busy caw of the rookery, and the first meek cry of the young lambs. The hares are hopping about the fields, the excitement of the season overcoming their habitual timidity. The bees are revelling in the yellow catkins of the sallow. The woods, though yet unadorned with their leafy garniture, are beautiful to look on. They seem flushed with life. Their boughs are of a clear

and glossy lead colour, and the tree tops are rich with the vigorous hues of brown, red, and purple; and, if you plunge into their solitudes, there are symptoms of revivification under your feet, the springing mercury, and green blades of the bluebells; and, perhaps, above you, the early nest of the missel-thrush, perched between the boughs of a young oak, to tinge your thoughts with the anticipation of summer. These are mornings not to be neglected by the lover of nature; and, if not neglected, then not to be forgotten, for they will stir the springs of memory, and make us live over again times and seasons, in which we cannot, for the pleasure and purity of our spirits, live too much."

Frogs, which, during winter, lay in a torpid state at the bottoms of ponds or ditches, are enlivened by the warmth of Spring, and early in this month rise to the surface of the water in vast numbers. They are at first very timorous, and dive to the bottom with great quickness as one approaches; but as the season advances they become bolder, and make themselves heard to a great distance by their croaking.

But nothing in the animal creation is a more

pleasing spectacle, than the sporting of the young lambs, most of which are yeaned this month, and are trusted abroad when the weather is tolerably mild. Dyer, in his poem of "The Fleece," gives a very natural and beautiful description of this circumstance :—

Spread around thy tend'rest diligence
In flow'ry Spring-time, when the new-dropt lamb,
Tott'ring with weakness by his mother's side,
Feels the fresh world about him, and each thorn,
Hillock, or furrow, trips his feeble feet:
Oh! guard his meek sweet innocence from all
The innum'rous ills that rush around his life!
Mark the quick kite, with beak and talons prone,
Circling the skies to snatch him from the plain!
Observe the lurking crows! beware the brake,
There the sly fox the careless minute waits!
Nor trust thy neighbour's dog, nor earth nor sky:
Thy bosom to a thousand cares divide!
Eurus oft slings his hail; the tardy fields
Pay not their promis'd food; and oft the dam
O'er her weak twins with empty udder mourns,
Or fails to guard, when the bold bird of prey
Alights, and hops in many turns around,
And tires her, also turning: to her aid
Be nimble, and the weakest, in thine arms,
Gently convey to the warm cote; and oft,
Between the lark's note, and the nightingale's,

His hungry bleating still with tepid milk:
In this soft office may thy children join,
And charitable habits learn in sport:
Nor yield him to himself, ere vernal airs
Sprinkle thy little croft with daisy flowers.

Another most agreeable token of the arrival of Spring is, that the bees—

Pilgrims of summer, who do bow the knee
At every shrine—

begin to venture out of their hives about the middle of this month. As their food is the honey-like juice found in the tubes of flowers, their coming abroad is a certain sign that flowers are now to be met with. No creature seems possessed of a greater power of foreseeing the weather; so that their appearance in the morning may be reckoned a sure token of a fair day. Sometimes, however, tempted by the warmth of the sun, they venture abroad too soon—

The insect-world, now sunbeams higher climb,
Oft dream of Spring, and wake before their time.
Bees stroke their little legs across their wings,
And venture short flights where the snowdrop brings
Its silver bell, and winter aconite
Its butter-cup-like flowers that shut at night,
With green leaf furling round its cup of gold,
Like tender maiden muffled from the cold;

They sip, and find their honey-dreams are vain,
Then feebly hasten to their hives again.
The butterflies, by eager hopes undone,
Glad as a child come out to greet the sun:
Beneath the shadow of a sudden shower
Are lost—nor see to-morrow's April flower.

CLARE.

As the month advances, the sun mounts very high, and has much influence; yet the piercing winds still prevail, so that it is often summer on one side of the hedge and winter on the other. Of these contrarieties the invalid complains, and the countryman repines that the springing of his grass and corn is retarded. Yet from these extremes, reconciled and moderated by the hand of Providence, much good results. Thus says the poet of nature, whose philosophic reflections and moral remarks are only to be equalled by his own matchless descriptions:—

Be patient, swains, these cruel seeming winds
Blow not in vain; for hence they keep repress'd
Those deepening clouds on clouds, surcharged with rain,
That o'er the vast Atlantic hither borne,
In endless rain would quench the summer blaze,
And cheerless drown the crude unripen'd year.

THOMSON

The gardens are now rendered gay by the crocus—

> The flower of Hope, whose hue
> Is bright with coming joy—

the varieties of which adorn the borders with a rich mixture of the brightest yellow and purple. The little shrubs of mezereon are in their beauty. The fields look green with the springing grass, but few wild flowers as yet appear to decorate the ground: daisies, however, begin to sprinkle the dry pastures; and the moist banks of ditches are enlivened with the glossy starlike yellow flowers of pilewort. Towards the end of the month, primroses peep out beneath the hedges, exciting, in the beholder, the poet's well-pleased exclamation—

> Lo! where the peeping primrose comes again!
>
> ELLIOTT.

and the most delightfully fragrant of all flowers, the violet, discovers itself—

> By its own breath unwittingly betray'd—

before the eye has perceived it in its lowly bed. Shakspeare compares an exquisitely sweet strain of music to the delicious scent of this flower:—

That song again—it had a dying fall:
Oh! it came o'er my ear like the sweet south,
That breathes upon a bank of violets,
Stealing and giving odour.

The flowers of Spring have been favourite themes for the poets. Shakspeare represents Perdita as desirous to present to her guests

Daffodils
That come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty; violets, dim,
But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes,
Or Cythereas breath; pale primroses,
That die unmarried, ere they can behold
Bright Phœbus in his strength, a malady
Most incident to maids; bold oxlips, and
The crown-imperial: lilies of all kinds,
The flower-de-luce being one!

and Chaucer has sung so melodiously and so affectionately of the charms of

These flowres, white and rede,
Soch that men callen daisies in our town,

as to entwine it with the recollections of himself. Shelley, among the moderns, in a single couplet, has left one of the most exquisite descriptions of this flower that ever was written—

Daisies, those pearl'd Arcturi of the earth,
The constellated flower that never sets!

And another poet endears it by a single epithet. He is seeking for a flower to place in the coffined hand of a dead infant—

Flowers! oh, a flower! a winter rose
That tiny hand to fill;
Go search the fields! the lichen wet,
Bends o'er the unfailing well:
Beneath the furrow lingers yet,
The scarlet pimpernel.
Peeps not a snowdrop in the bower,
Where never froze the spring?
A daisy? oh! bring childhood's flower,
The half-blown daisy bring!
Yes, lay the daisy's little head,
Beside the little cheek;
Oh, haste! the last of five is dead!
The childless cannot speak!

ELLIOTT.

Wordsworth, with the garrulity of a nurse fondling a beloved infant, lavishes on it, in a single poem, several endearing appellations, in one verse styling it—

A nun demure of lowly port,

and a line or two further on—

A queen in crown of rubies drest,

and, again,

> A little Cyclops with one eye,
> Staring to threaten or defy!

The primrose, also, has been embalmed in song. Milton introduces it in terms of endearment "the rathe primrose that forsaken dies!" as if its little heart was too gentle to withstand alone the rude shocks of the world. The twin-sister of the primrose Milton finely characterises—

> Cowslips wan that hang the pensive head;

and Clare, the simple-minded peasant poet, speaks of them as—

> Bowing adorers of the gale.

The "glowing violet" Milton also includes in the floral offering. Shakspeare's tribute to the exquisite odour of the violet we have already quoted. Herrick thus fancifully accounts for its colour:—

> Love, on a day, wise poets tell,
> Some time in wrangling spent;
> Whether the violet should excel,
> Or she, in sweetest scent.

But Venus having lost the day,
Poore girles she fell on you,
And beate ye so as some dare say,
Her blows did make ye blew.

There are several kinds of violets; but the fragrant (both blue and white) is the earliest, thence called the *March violet*. Singularly enough the variety which comes with the more genial smile of April is odourless.

There are many varieties of the primrose, says the author of "Flora Domestica," but the most common are the sulphur-coloured and the lilac. The lilac primrose does not equal the others in beauty; we do not often find it wild; it is chiefly known to us as a garden flower. It is, indeed, the sulphur-coloured primrose which we particularly understand by that name; it is *the* primrose, it is this which we associate with the cowslips and the meadows, it is this which shines like an earth-star from the grass by the brook-side, lighting the hand to pluck it. We do, indeed, give the name of primrose to the lilac flower, but we do this in courtesy; we feel that it is not the primrose of our youth, not the primrose with which we have played at bo-peep in the

woods; not the irresistible primrose which has so often lured our young feet among the wet grass, and procured us colds and chidings. There is a sentiment in flowers: there are flowers we cannot look upon, or even hear named, without recurring to something that has an interest in our hearts, and assuredly the primrose is of the number. How poetical and picturesque is the following address to this beloved spring-flower. One could almost imagine one's-self wandering mid the smiles of Spring, through some unfrequented pathway in the silent woods, stopping, now and then, to gaze on the pale beauty of this forest *Hebe*, as it smiles on us from the sunny bank, mid the brown and matted leaves of a bygone summer—

Welcome, pale primrose! starting up between
  Dead matted leaves of ash and oak, that strew
  The every lawn, the wood, and spinny through,
'Mid creeping moss and ivy's darker green;
  How much thy presence beautifies the ground,
How sweet thy modest, unaffected pride,
Glows on the sunny bank, and wood's warm side.
  And when thy fairy flowers in groups are found,
The school-boy roams enchantedly along,
  Plucking the fairest with a rude delight;
While the meek shepherd stops his simple song,
  To gaze a moment on the pleasing sight;

O'erjoyed to see the flowers that truly bring,
The welcome news of sweet returning Spring.

CLARE.

Even the most unpoetical nature must have been occasionally conscious of some such emotion as is embodied in the lines—

There's to me
A daintiness about these early flowers
That touches one like poetry.

Bryant, the first among the poets of America, thus apostrophizes this blustering month :—

The stormy March is come at last,
With wind and cloud and changing skies :
I hear the rushing of the blast,
That through the snowy valley flies.

Ah ! passing few are those who speak,
Wild, stormy month, in praise of thee !
Yet, though thy winds are loud and bleak,
Thou art a welcome month to me.

For thou to northern lands again,
The glad and glorious sun dost bring ;
And thou hast joined the gentle train,
And wear'st the gentle name of Spring.

And in thy reign of blast and storm,
Smiles many a long bright sunny day ;
When the changed winds are soft and warm,
And heaven puts on the blue of May.

Then sing aloud the gushing rills,
  And the full springs from frost set free,
That brightly leaping down the hills,
  Are just set out to meet the sea.

The year's departing beauty hides,
  Of wintry storms the sullen threat;
But in thy sternest frown abides,
  A look of kindly promise yet.

Thou bring'st the hope of those calm skies,
  And that soft hue of sunny showers;
When the wide bloom on earth that lies,
  Seems of a brighter world than ours.

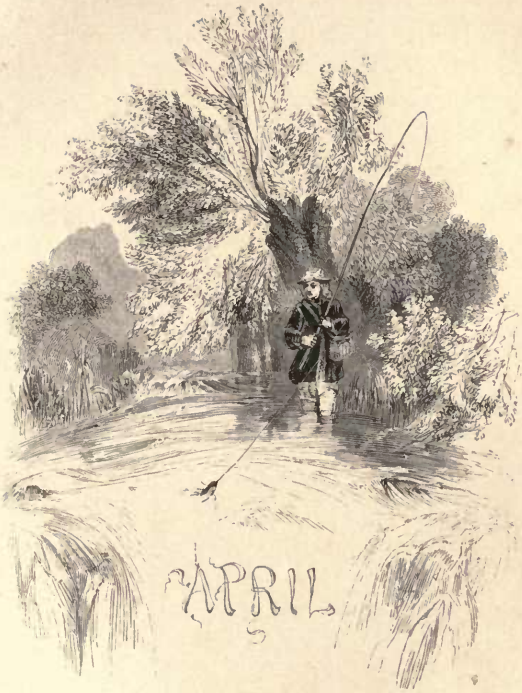
The sallow now enlivens the hedges with its catkins full of yellow dust; and the alder-trees are covered with a kind of black bunches. The leaves of the honeysuckle are nearly expanded. In the gardens, the peach and nectarine, the almond, the cherry and apricot trees, come into full bud during this month. The gardeners find plenty of employment in pruning trees, digging and manuring the ground, and preparing it for sowing a great variety of seeds, both for the flower and kitchen garden.

Among the March visitants, especially if the season be mild, that now delights the eye of the observer, is the rich scarlet flower of the *Pyrus*

Japonica; and the sweet-smelling jonquil irradiates the flower-border, and if he ventures into the fields, and braves the blustering winds of the season, he will be charmed by the coltsfoot pushing forth its golden flowers ere yet it shews a single green leaf, and by the bright blue blossoms of some of the earlier speedwells. Nor will he pass unheeded the celandine and the butter-cup, whose bright golden faces recall many an hour of childhood and happiness—of the time when "daisies and butter-cups gladdened our sight, like treasures of silver and gold." There is the Arum, too, with its curious sheaths, enfolding the singular spire of yellow, purple, or pink. And how delicately do the light blossoms of the wild strawberry gem the banks with their small silvery stars! And if he penetrate into the woods, whither he may be attracted by the sound of the woodman's axe, and the crash of falling branches, startling the forest silence, and, perhaps, interrupting the "warbling and chirping and chattering" of the birds, who seem as if they could never sufficiently welcome the glorious Spring, he may witness all the "pomp and circumstance" of the felling of a mighty oak!

In the latter part of this month, the *equinox*

happens, when day and night are of an equal length all over the globe; or, rather, when the sun is an equal time above and below the horizon: for, the morning and evening twilight make apparent day considerably longer than night. This takes place again in September. The first is called the *vernal*, the latter the *autumnal*, equinox. At these times, storms and tempests are particularly frequent. March winds are boisterous and vehement to a proverb.



I never see
Those dear delights which April still does bring,
But memory's tongue repeats it all to me,
I view her pictures with an anxious eye;
I hear her stories with a pleasing pain:
Youth's wither'd flowers, alas! ye make me sigh,
To think on me ye'll never bloom again!

JOHN CLARE.

APRIL.

The author of the "Fairie Queene," gives a gorgeous description of this Proteus among the months, and Shakspeare refers to that glorious time—

> the Spring,
> When proud-pied April, dressed in all his trim,
> Hath put a spirit of youth in everything.

"April," says the author of the "Mirror of the Months," "is Spring—the only Spring month that we possess—at once the most juvenile of the months, and the most feminine—never knowing her own mind for a day together. Fickle as a fond maiden with her first lover; toying it with the young sun till he withdraws his beams from her, and then weeping till she gets them back again. April is, doubtless, the sweetest month of

all the year; partly because it ushers in the May, and partly for its own sake. It is to May and June, what 'sweet fifteen,' in the age of woman, is to the passion-stricken eighteen, and perfect two-and-twenty. It is to the confirmed Summer, what the previous hope of joy is to the full fruition: what the boyish dream of love is to love itself. It is, indeed, the month of promises, and what are twenty performances compared with one promise? April, then, is worth two Mays, because it tells tales of May, in every sigh that it breathes, and every tear that it lets fall. It is the harbinger, the herald, the promise, the prophecy, the foretaste of all the beauties that are to follow it—of all and more—of all the delights of Summer, and all the 'pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious' Autumn. It is fraught with beauties itself, which no other month can bring before us, and—

> It bears a glass which shows us many more.

It is one sweet alternation of smiles, and sighs, and tears—and tears, and sighs, and smiles—till it is consummated at last in the open laughter of May."

April weather is proverbial for a mixture of the bright and gloomy. The pleasantness of the sun-shiny days, with the delightful view of fresh greens and newly-opened flowers, is unequalled; but they are frequently overcast with clouds, and chilled by rough wintry blasts.

This month, as has been already remarked, gives the most perfect image of Spring, everything—

> Looks beautiful as when an infant wakes
> From its soft slumbers;

and the vicissitudes of warm gleams of sunshine, and gentle showers, have the most powerful effects in hastening the universal *springing* of the vegetable tribes; whence the season derives its appellation.

April generally begins with raw unpleasant weather, the influence of the equinoctial storms still in some degree prevailing. Its opening is thus described—

> Mindful of disaster past,
> And shrinking at the northern blast,
> The sleety storm returning still,
> The morning hoar, the evening chill,

Reluctant comes the timid Spring;
Scarce a bee, with airy ring,
Murmurs the blossom'd boughs around
That clothe the garden's southern bound;
Scarce a sickly straggling flower
Decks the rough castle's rifted tower;
Scarce the hardy primrose peeps
From the dark dell's entangled steeps.
Fringing the forest's devious edge,
Half-robed appears the hawthorn hedge,
Or to the distant eye displays,
Weakly green, its budding sprays.

WARTON.

An anonymous writer thus describes one of those bright, transient showers which prevail at this season—

Away to that sunny nook, for the thick shower
Rushes on stridingly: ay, now it comes,
Glancing about the leaves with its first dips,
Like snatches of faint music. Joyous thrush,
It mingles with thy song, and beats soft time
To thy bubbling shrillness. Now it louder falls,
Pattering, like the far voice of leaping rills;
And now it breaks upon the shrinking clumps
With a crash of many sounds; the thrush is still.
There are sweet scents abound us; the violet hides
On that green bank; the primrose sparkles there:
The earth is grateful to the teeming clouds,

And yields a sudden freshness to their kisses.
But now the shower slopes to the warm west,
Leaving a dewy track; and see, the big drops,
Like falling pearls, glisten in the sunny mist,
The air is clear again; and the far woods
Shine out in their early green. Let's onward, then,
For the first blossoms peep about the path,
The lambs are nibbling the short dripping grass,
And the birds are on the bushes.

The Corn Law Rhymer fitly describes the change in two admirable lines—

The shower is past, the birds renew their songs,
And sweetly through its tears the landscape smiles!
ELLIOTT.

Early in the month, that welcome guest and harbinger of Summer, the swallow, returns. The kind first seen, is the chimney or house-swallow, known by its long forked tail and red breast. At first, here and there only one appears glancing quickly by us, as if scarcely able to endure the cold—

The swallow, for a moment seen,
Skims in haste the village-green,
WARTON.

but, in a few days their number is much in-

creased, and they sport with seeming pleasure in the warm sunshine—

> Along the surface of the winding stream,
> Pursuing every turn gay swallows skim,
> Or round the borders of the spacious lawn
> Fly in repeated circles, rising o'er
> Hillock and fence with motion serpentine,
> Easy and light. One snatches from the ground
> A downy feather, and then upward springs,
> Follow'd by others, but oft drops it soon,
> In playful mood, or from too slight a hold,
> When all at once dart at the falling prize.
>
> WILCOX.

As these birds live on insects, their appearance is a certain proof that some of this minute tribe of animals are now got abroad from their winter retreats.

The birds are now busied in pairing, and building their nests—

> Some to the holly hedge
> Nestling repair, and to the thicket some;
> Some to the rude protection of the thorn
> Commit their feeble offspring. The cleft tree
> Offers its kind concealment to a few,
> Their food its insects, and its moss their nests.
> Others apart, far in the grassy dale,

Or roughening waste, their humble texture weave:
But most in woodland solitudes delight,
In unfrequented glooms, or shaggy banks,
Steep, and divided by a babbling brook,
Whose murmurs soothe them all the live-long day,
When by kind duty fix'd. Among the roots
Of hazel, pendent o'er the plaintive stream,
They frame the first foundation of their domes;
Dry sprigs of trees, in artful fabric laid,
And bound with clay together. Now 'tis nought
But restless hurry through the busy air,
Beat by unnumber'd wings. The swallow sweeps
The slimy pool, to build the hanging house
Intent. And often, from the careless back
Of herds and flocks, a thousand tugging bills
Pluck hair and wool; and oft, when unobserved,
Steal from the barn a straw: till soft and warm,
Clean and complete, their habitation grows.

THOMSON.

Thus far the author of the Seasons. Another poet completes the picture—

The cavern-loving wren sequestered seeks
The verdant shelter of the hollow stump;
And with congenial moss, harmless deceit,
Constructs a safe abode. On topmost boughs
The glossy raven and the hoarse-voiced crow,
Rocked by the storm, erect their airy nests.
The ousel, lone frequenter of the grove

Of fragrant pines in solemn depth of shade,
Finds rest. Or mid the holly's shining leaves,
A simple bush the piping thrush contents,
Though in the woodland contest, he aloft,
Trills from his spotted throat a powerful strain,
And scorns the humbler quire. The lark, too, asks
A lowly dwelling hid beneath a turf,
Or hollow, trodden by the sinking hoof:
Songster of heaven! who to the sun such lays
Pours forth as earth ne'er owns. Within the hedge
The sparrow lays her sky-stain'd eggs. The barn,
With eaves o'er-pendent, holds the chattering tribe.
Secret the linnet seeks the tangled copse,
The white owl seeks some antique ruined wall,
Fearless of rapine; or in hollow trees,
Which age has cavern'd, safely courts repose.
The thievish pie, in two-fold colours clad,
Roofs o'er her curious nest with firm-wreathed twigs,
And sidelong forms her cautious door; she dreads
The talon'd kite or pouncing hawk; savage
Herself, with craft suspicion ever dwells.

BIDLAKE.

As the singing of birds is the voice of courtship and conjugal love, the concerts of the groves begin to fill all with their various melody. Soon after the arrival of the swallow, the nightingale, that most accomplished and enchanting of songsters, is heard—

Sweet bird that shunn'st the noise of folly,
Most musical, most melancholy!
Thee, chantress, oft, the woods among,
I woo, to hear thy even-song.

MILTON.

He sings by day as well as by night; but in the day-time his voice is drowned in the multitude of performers; in the evening it is heard alone; whence the poets have always made the song of the nightingale a nocturnal serenade.

The author of the "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," thus beautifully describes an April night, and the song of this syren :—

All is still,
A balmy night! and though the stars be dim,
Yet let us think upon the vernal showers
That gladden the green earth, and we shall find
A pleasure in the dimness of the stars.
And hark! the nightingale begins his song,
He crowds, and hurries, and precipitates,
With fast thick warble, his delicious notes,
As he were fearful that an April night
Would be too short for him to utter forth
His love chant, and disburden his full soul
Of all its music!

I know a grove
Of large extent, hard by a castle huge,

Which the great lord inhabits not: and so
This grove is wild with tangling underwood,
And the trim walks are broken up; and grass,
Thin grass and king-cups, grow within the paths;
But never elsewhere in one place I knew
So many nightingales. And far and near,
In wood and thicket over the wide grove,
They answer and provoke each others songs—
With skirmish and capricious passagings,
And murmurs musical and swift—jug, jug!
And one low piping sound more sweet than all,
Stirring the air with such a harmony
That, should you close your eyes, you might almost
Forget it was not day! On moonlight bushes
Whose dewy leafets are but half disclosed,
You may, perchance, behold them on the twigs,
Their bright, bright eyes, their eyes both bright and full,
Glistening, while many a glowworm in the shade
Lights up her love-torch.
Oft a moment's space,
What time the moon was lost behind a cloud,
Hath heard a pause of silence; till the moon
Emerging, hath awaken'd earth and sky
With one sensation, and those wakeful birds
Have all burst forth in choral minstrelsy,
As if one quick and sudden gale had swept
An hundred airy harps! And I have watch'd
Many a nightingale perch'd giddily
On bloss'ming twig, still swinging from the breeze,

And to that motion tune his wanton song,
Like tipsy Joy that reels with tossing head.

COLERIDGE.

Milton, too, in the first of his sonnets, has a beautiful address to this success-portending songster :—

O nightingale, that on yon bloomy spray
Warblest at eve, when all the woods are still,
Thou with fresh hope the lover's heart dost fill,
While the jolly hours lead on propitious May.

Another of the most striking events of this month, is the renewal of the cuckoo's note, which is generally heard about the middle of April :—

Now Spring cometh, and the cuckoo's voice,
That ever follows where she treads on flowers.

ELLIOTT.

This is so remarkable a circumstance, that it has commanded attention in all countries ; and several rustic sayings, and the names of several plants which flower at this time, are derived from it :—

Now daises pied, and violets blue,
And lady-smocks all silver white,
And cuckoo-buds of yellow hue,
Do paint the meadows with delight;
The cuckoo now on every tree,
Sings cuckoo! cuckoo!

SHAKSPEARE.

The cuckoo's arrival is regularly preceded some days by that of the wryneck, a small bird, singular in its attitude and plumage, and living upon insects which harbour in the bark of trees, which it extracts by means of its long tongue, furnished with a sharp, bony tip. The wryneck, also, has a peculiar note, or cry, easily distinguished by those who have once heard it. Other birds which are seen amongst us only in the warmer months, as the redstart, white-throat, and yellow wagtail, appear in April.

The fishes are now inspired by the same enlivening influence which acts upon the rest of animated Nature; and, in consequence, again offer themselves as a prey to the art of the angler, who returns to his usual haunt—

> Beneath a willow long forsook,
> The fisher seeks his 'custom'd nook;
> And bursting through the crackling sedge
> That crown's the current's cavern'd edge,
> He startles from the bordering wood
> The bashful wild-duck's early brood.
>
> WARTON.

A considerable number of plants flower in this month:—

Neglected now the early daisy lies,
Nor thou pale primrose bloom'st the only prize,
Advancing Spring profusely spreads abroad
Flowers of all hues with sweetest fragrance stored,
Where'er she treads Love gladdens every plain,
Delight on tip-toe bears her lucid train;
Sweet Hope with conscious brow before her flies,
Anticipating wealth for summer skies.

BLOOMFIELD.

In particular, many of the fruit-bearing trees and shrubs, the flowers of which are peculiarly termed *blossoms*. These form a most agreeable spectacle, as well on account of their beauty, as of the promise they give of future benefits.

"What exquisite differences, and distinctions, and resemblances," exclaims the writer already quoted, "there are between all the various blossoms of the fruit trees; and no less in their general effect, than in their separate details! The almond-blossom which comes first of all, and while the tree is quite bare of leaves, is of a bright blush-rose colour; and when they are fully blown, the tree, if it has been kept to a compact head, instead of being permitted to straggle, looks like one huge rose, magnified by some fairy magic, to deck the bosom of some fair giantess. The various kinds

of plum follow, the blossoms of which are snow white, and as full and clustering as those of the almond. The peach and nectarine, which are now full-blown, are unlike either of the above; and their sweet effect, as if growing out of the hard, bare wall, or rough wooden paling, is peculiarly pretty. They are of a deep blush colour, and of a delicate bell-shape; the lips, however, divided and turning backward, to expose the interior to the cherishing sun. But, perhaps, the bloom that is richest, and most promising in its general appearance, is that of the cherry clasping its white honours all round the long straight branches, from heel to point, and not letting a leaf or a bit of stem be seen, except the three or four leaves that come as a green finish at the extremity of each branch. The blossoms of the pears, and (loveliest of all) the apples, do not come in perfection till next month."

It is, however, an anxious time for the possessor, as the fairest prospect of a plentiful increase is often blighted. Shakspeare draws a pathetic comparison from this circumstance, to paint the delusive nature of human expectations :—

This is the state of man: To-day he puts forth
The tender leaves of hope; to-morrow blossoms,
And bears his blushing honours thick upon him;
The third day comes a frost, a killing frost!

And Milton beautifully uses the same simile:—

Abortive as the first-born bloom of Spring,
Nipp'd with the lagging rear of Winter's frost.

Herrick indulges in the following "fond imaginings" "to blossoms:"—

Fair pledges of a fruitful tree
Why do you fall so fast?
Your date is not so past
But you may stay yet here awhile
To blush and gently smile
And go at last!

What! where ye born to be
An hour or half's delight?
And so to bid good night?
'Tis pity Nature brought ye forth,
Merely to show your worth
And lose you quite!

But your lovely leaves where we
May read how soon things have
Their end, though ne'er so brave:
And after they have shown their pride
Like you awhile they glide
Into the grave.

HERRICK.

The apricot and the peach-tree lead the way in blossoming, and are followed by the cherry and plum. The black-thorn or sloe (which is a species of plum), also enlivens the hedges with its flowers in this month.

The poet of the Seasons gives delightful utterance to the aspirations of many a bosom at this inspiring season :—

Now from the town,
Buried in smoke, and sleep, and noisome damps,
Oft let me wander o'er the dewy fields,
Where freshness breathes; and dash the trembling drops
From the bent bush, as through the verdant maze
Of sweetbriar hedges I pursue my walk;
Or taste the smell of dairy; or ascend
Some eminence, Augusta, in thy plains,
And see the country far diffused around,
One boundless blush of white empurpled shower
Of mingled blossoms, where the raptured eye
Hurries from joy to joy, and hid beneath
The fair profusion, yellow Autumn spies.

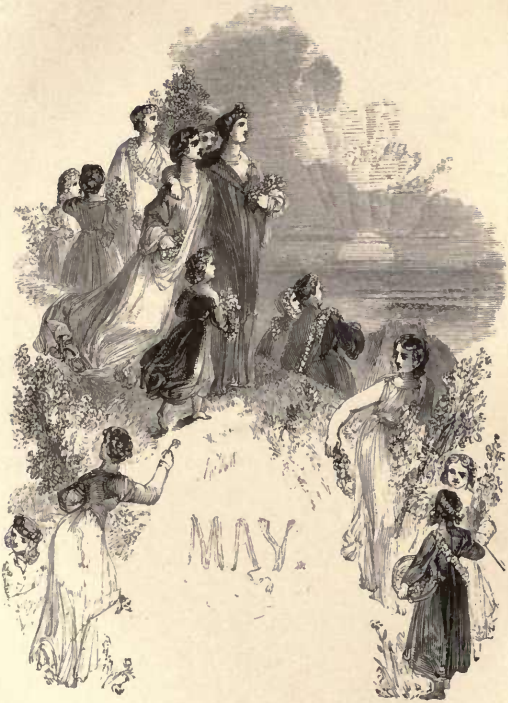
THOMSON.

The farmer is still busied in sowing different sorts of grain and seeds for fodder, for which purpose dry weather is most suitable, though

plentiful showers, at due intervals, are desirable for feeding the young grass and springing corn :—

The work is done, no more to man is given,
The grateful farmer trusts the rest to Heaven;
Yet oft with anxious heart he looks around,
And marks the first green blade that breaks the ground;
In fancy sees his trembling oats uprun,
His tufted barley yellow with the sun,
Sees clouds propitious shed their timely store,
And all his harvest gather'd round his door.

BLOOMFIELD.



Oh, come! and while the rosy-footed May
Steals blushing on, together let us tread
The morning dews, and gather in their prime
Fresh-blooming flowers.

THOMSON.

MAY.

MAY has ever been the favourite month of the year in poetical description; but the praises so lavishly bestowed upon it took their rise from climates more southern than ours. In such, it really unites all the soft beauties of Spring with the radiance of Summer, and has warmth enough to cheer and invigorate, without overpowering.

May, sweet May, again is come,
May that frees the land from gloom;
Children, children! up and see
All her stores of jollity.
On the laughing hedgerow's side
She hath spread her treasures wide;
She is in the greenwood shade,
Where the nightingale hath made
Every branch and every tree
Ring with her sweet melody:

Hill and dale are May's own treasures,
Youths rejoice! In sportive measures
Sing ye! join the chorus gay!
Hail this merry, merry May!

Up, then, children! we will go,
Where the blooming roses grow;
In a joyful company,
We the bursting flowers will see;
Up, your festal dress prepare!
Where gay hearts are meeting, there
May hath pleasures most inviting,
Heart, and sight, and ear, delighting;
Listen to the bird's sweet song,
Hark! how soft it floats along.
Courtly dames! our pleasures share;
Never saw I May so fair:
Therefore, dancing will we go,
Youths rejoice! the flow'rets blow!
Sing ye! join the chorus gay!
Hail this merry, merry May!

With us, however, great part of the month is yet too chilly for a perfect enjoyment of the charms of Nature; and frequent injury is done to the flowers and young fruits during its course, by blights and blasting winds. May-day, though still observed in some parts as a rural festival, has often little pleasure to bestow but that arising from the name.

In Hone's "Every-day Book" are collected many details of the manner in which this "high festival" was celebrated in the olden time. From this source we borrow the following extract from "an honest gatherer of olden chronicles."

"In the moneth of May, namely, on May-day, in the morning, every man, except impediment, would walk into the sweet meddowes and green woods, there to rejoyce their spirits with the beauty and savour of sweet flowers, and with the harmonie of birds praising God in their kinde. And for example hereof Edward Hall hath noted that King Henry the Eighth, as in the third of his reigne, and divers other yeares, so namely in the seventh of his reigne on May-day in the morning, with Queene Katherine his wife, accompanied with many lords and ladies, rode a Maying from Greenwich to the high ground of Shooter's Hill; where as they passed by the way they espyed a company of tall yeomen clothed all in greene, with greene hoodes, and with bowes and arrows to the number of 200. One being their chieftian was called Robin Hood, who required the king and all his company to stay and see his men shoot: whereunto the king granting, Robin

Hood whistled, and all the 200 archers shot off, loosing all at once: and when he whistled again, they likewise shot again; their arrowes whistled by craft of the hand, so that the noise was strange and loud, which greatly delighted the king, queene, and their company.

"Moreover, this Robin Hood desired the king and queene, with their retinue, to enter the greene wood where with arbours made of boughs and decked with flowers, they were set and served plentifully with venison and wine by Robin Hood and his men, to their great contentment, and had other pageants and pastimes."

From the same author we learn that in ancient times the citizens of London celebrated this festival, sometimes two or three parishes joining together to give due splendour and solemnity to the observance, and "did fetch in May-poles, with divers warlike shewes, with good archers, morice-dancers, and other devises for pastime all the day long: and towards the evening they had stage-players and bonefires in the streetes." On occasion of one of these Mayings, "when the aldermen and sheriffes of London had a worshipfull dinner for themselves and other commers,

Lydgate, the poet, that was a monk of Bury, sent to them by a pursuivant a joyfull commendation of the season, containing sixteene staves in meeter royall, beginning thus :—

Mighty Flora, goddesse of freshe floures,
  Which clothed hath the soyle in lusty greene,
Made buds to spring with her sweet shoures,
  By influence of the sunne shine ;
To doe pleasance of intent full clean
  Unto the states which now set heare,
Hath Ver downe sent her own daughter deare.

Making the vertue that dured in the roote,
  Called the vertue, the vertue vegetable,
For to transcend most wholesome and most soote
  In to the top this season so agreeable :
  The bawmy liquor is so commendable
That it rejoiceth with his fresh moisture,
  Man, beaste, and fowle, and every creature."

The reader will excuse the insertion of a larger portion of this "joyfull commendation of the season," for the purpose of making room for an extract from "a poet who has not versified—Mr. Washington Irving." I shall never forget, says he, the delight I felt on first seeing a Maypole. It was on the banks of the Dee, close by the picturesque old bridge that stretches across

the river from the quaint little city of Chester. I had already been carried back into former days by the antiquities of that venerable place; the examination of which is equal to turning over the pages of a black-letter volume, or gazing on the pictures of Froissart. The May-pole on the margin of that poetic stream completed the illusion. My fancy adorned it with wreaths of flowers, and peopled the green bank with all the dancing revelry of May-day. The mere sight of this May-pole gave a glow to my feelings and spread a charm over the country for the rest of the day; and as I traversed a part of the fair plains of Cheshire and the beautiful borders of Wales, and looked from among swelling hills down a long green valley, through which "the Deva wound its wizard stream," my imagination turned all into a perfect Arcadia. One can readily imagine what a gay scene it must have been in jolly old London, when the doors were decorated with flowering branches, when every hat was decked with hawthorn, and Robin Hood, Friar Tuck, Maid Marian, the morris-dancers, and all the other fantastic masks and revellers were performing their antics about the May-pole

in every part of the city. On this occasion, we are told, Robin Hood presided as Lord of the May—

With coat of Lincoln green, and mantle too,
And horn of ivory mouth, and buckle bright;
And arrows, winged with peacocks' feathers light,
And trusty bow, well gather'd of the yew.

While near him, as Lady of the May, Maid Marian—

With eyes of blue,
Shining through dusk hair, like the stars of night,
And habited in pretty forest plight—
His greenwood beauty sits young as the dew.

And there, too, in a subsequent stage of the pageant, were—

The archer-men in green, with belt and bow,
Feasting on pheasant, river-fowl, and swan,
With Robin at their head and Marian.

I value every custom, continues this delightful writer, that tends to infuse poetical feeling into the common people, and to sweeten and soften the rudeness of rustic manners without destroying their simplicity. Indeed, it is to the decline of this happy simplicity that the decline of this custom may be traced; and the rural

dance on the green, and the homely May-day pageant, have gradually disappeared in proportion as the peasantry have become expensive and artificial in their pleasures, and too knowing for simple enjoyment. Some attempts have, indeed, been made, of late years, by men of both taste and learning, to rally back the popular feeling to these standards of primitive simplicity; but the time has gone by, the feeling has become chilled by habits of gain and traffic; the country apes the manners and amusements of the town, and little is heard of May-day at present, except from the lamentations of authors, who sigh after it from among the brick walls of the city.

Alas! for the decay of these good old customs:

Happy the age, and harmless were the dayes
(For then true love and amity was found),
When every village did a May-pole raise,
And whitsun-ales and May-games did abound:
And all the lusty younkers in a rout,
With merry lasses daunced the rod about;
Then friendship to their banquet bid the guests,
And poore men far'd the better for their feasts.

PASQUIL'S PALINODIA, 1634.

Spring is now with us, says one of the most poetical of our chroniclers of the seasons, once more

pacing the earth in all the primal pomp of her beauty, with flowers and soft airs and the song of birds everywhere about her, and the blue sky and the bright clouds above. But there is one thing wanting to give that happy completeness to her advent which belonged to it in the olden times; and without which it is like a beautiful melody without words, or a beautiful flower without scent, or a beautiful face without a soul. The voice of man is no longer heard, hailing her approach as she hastens to bless him; and his choral symphonies no longer must bless *her* in return—bless her by letting her behold and hear the happiness that she comes to create. The soft songs of women are no longer blended with her breath, as it whispers among the new leaves; their slender feet no longer trace *her* footsteps in the fields, and woods and wayside copses, or dance delighted measures round the flowery offerings that she prompted their lovers to place before them on the village green. Even the little children themselves that have an instinct for the Spring, and feel it to the very tips of their fingers, are permitted to let May come upon them without knowing from

whence the impulse of happiness that they feel proceeds, or whither it tends. In short—

> All the earth is gay;
> Land and sea
> Give themselves up to jollity;
> And with the heart of May
> Doth every beast keep holiday:

while man—man alone—lets the season come without glorying in it; and when it goes, he lets it go without regret; as if all seasons and their change were alike to him; or, rather, as if he were the lord of all seasons, and they were to do homage and honour to him, instead of he to them! How is this? Is it that we have "sold our birthright for a mess of pottage?"—that we have bartered "our beings end and aim" for a purse of gold? Alas! thus it is:—

> The world is too much with us; late and soon,
> Getting and spending we lay waste our powers:
> Little we see in Nature that is ours;
> We have given our hearts away—a sordid boon.

The month, however, on the whole, is, even in this country, sufficiently profuse of beauties; inviting us to walk abroad in the fields and breathe the fresh atmosphere of Nature:—

Come hither, come hither, and view the face
Of Nature, enrobed in her vernal grace.
By the hedgerow wayside flowers are springing;
On the budding elms the birds are singing;
And up—up—up to the gates of heaven
Mounts the lark, on the wings of her rapture driven:
The voice of the streamlet is fresh and loud;
On the sky there is not a speck of cloud:
Come hither, come hither, and join with me,
In the season's delightful jubilee!

Come hither, come hither, and guess with me,
How fair and how fruitful the year will be!
Look into the pasture-grounds o'er the pale,
And behold the foal with its switching tail,
About and abroad, in its mirth it flies,
With its long black forelocks about its eyes;
Or bends its neck down with a stretch,
The daisy's earliest flowers to reach.
See, as on by the hawthorn fence we pass,
How the sheep are nibbling the tender grass,
Or holding their heads to the sunny ray,
As if their hearts, like its smile, were gay;
While the chattering sparrows, in and out,
Fly the shrubs, and the trees, and roofs about;
And sooty rooks, loudly cawing, roam,
With sticks and straws, to their woodland home.

D. M. Moir.

The earth is covered with the freshest green of the grass and young corn, and adorned with

numerous flowers opening on every side. The trees put on all their verdure; the hedges are rich in fragrance from the snowy blossoms of the hawthorn; and the orchards display their highest beauty in the delicate blush of the apple-blossoms.

From the moist meadow to the wither'd hill,
Led by the breeze, the vivid verdure runs,
And swells, and deepens, to the cherish'd eye.
The hawthorn whitens; and the juicy groves
Put forth their buds, unfolding by degrees,
Till the whole leafy forest stands display'd
In full luxuriance.

THOMSON.

All this scene of beauty and fertility is, however, sometimes dreadfully ravaged by the blights which peculiarly occur in this month. The mischief seems to be done chiefly by innumerable swarms of very small insects, which are brought by the north-east winds:—

If brush'd from Russian wilds, a cutting gale
Rise not, and scatter from his humid wings
The clammy mildew; or, dry blowing, breathe
Untimely frosts; before whose baleful blast
The full-blown Spring through all her foliage shrinks,
Joyless and dead, a wide dejected waste.
For oft, engender'd by the hazy north,

Myriads on myriads, insect armies waft
Keen in the poison'd breeze; and wasteful eat,
Through buds and bark, into the blacken'd core
Their eager way.

THOMSON.

A cold and windy May is, however, accounted favourable to the corn; which, if brought forward by early warm weather, is apt to run into stalk, while its ears remain thin and light.

A cold May, and a windy,
Makes a fat barn and a findy,

says the old adage.

The first of May is the general time for turning out cattle into the pastures, though frequently then very bare of grass. The milk soon becomes more copious, and of finer quality, from the juices in the young grass; and it is in this month that the making of cheeses is usually begun in the dairies.

The gardens now yield an agreeable, though immature product, in the young gooseberries and currants, which are highly acceptable to our tables, now almost exhausted of their store of preserved fruits.

The woodman is now busily employed in fell-

ing and barking trees, and many a monarch of the forest, whose gnarled stem has, for years, braved the "summer's heat and winter's cold," bends beneath his resistless axe:—

Each hedge is covered thick with green,
And where the hedger late hath been,
Young tender shoots begin to grow,
From out the mossy stumps below.
But woodmen still on Spring intrude,
And thin the shadow's solitude,
With sharpen'd axes felling down,
The oak-trees budding into brown;
Which, as they crash upon the ground,
A crowd of labourers gather round,
These mixing 'mong the shadows dark,
Rip off the crackling, staining bark;
Depriving yearly, when they come,
The green woodpecker of his home;
Who early in the Spring began,
Far from the sight of troubling man,
To bore his round holes in each tree,
In fancy's sweet security;
Now startled by the woodman's noise,
He wakes from all his dreary joys.

CLARE.

The leafing of trees is commonly completed in this month. It begins with the aquatic kinds, such as the willow, poplar, and alder; and ends

with the oak, beech, and ash. These are sometimes very bare of foliage even at the close of May.

Leigh Hunt gives us a little Claude-like picture of a May morning, clear and bright as its subject :—

The sun is up and 'tis a morn of May
Round old Ravenna's clear-shown towers and bay—
A morn, the loveliest which the year has seen,
Last of the Spring, yet fresh with all its green ;
For a warm eve and gentle rains at night,
Have left a sparkling welcome for the light;
And there's a crystal clearness all about;
The leaves are sharp, the distant hills look out,
A balmy briskness comes upon the breeze,
The smoke goes dancing from the cottage trees;
And when you listen you may hear a coil
Of bubbling springs about the grassy soil;
And all the scene, in short—sky, earth, and sea,
Breathes like a bright-eyed face that laughs out openly.

LEIGH HUNT.

Among the numerous wild flowers which now adorn the fields and copses, none attracts more notice than the cowslip—

Whose bashful flowers,
Declining, hide their beauty from the sun,
Nor give their spotted bosoms to the gaze,
Of hasty passenger.

On hedge-banks, the wild germander is conspicuous; this pretty wilding seems to be a special favourite of the Corn Law Rhymer. In one place he describes it as—

> Brighter than the bright Heaven the speedwell blue;

and elsewhere speaks of it—

> Again a child, where childhood roved, I run,
> While groups of speedwell with their bright blue eyes,
> Like happy children, cluster in the sun.
>
> ELLIOTT.

The whole surface of the meadows is often covered with the yellow crowfoot. These flowers are also called buttercups, and are supposed, by some, to give the butter its rich yellow tinge at this season. This notion is erroneous, however, as the cows will not touch it, on account of its acrid taste. The violet still lingers at the foot of the hedges. What a picture of "solemn repose," of silent desert-like solitude, is conveyed in the lines of the most gifted of American poets in describing the *habitat* of this sweet flower:—

> I know where the young May violet grows
> In its lone and lowly nook,

On the mossy bank where the larch tree throws
Its broad dark boughs in solemn repose,
Far over the silent brook.

BRYANT.

It is delightful, thus even in fancy, to wander 'mid the sabbath solitudes of transatlantic forests, where, "far from the busy hum of men," up some brook's still course—

whose current mines
The forests blacken'd roots, and whose green marge
Is seldom visited by human foot,
The lonely heron sits, and hardly breaks
The sabbath silence of the wilderness.

M'LELLAN.

Clare, has a few lines finely descriptive of the pasture scenery of May :—

How lovely now are lanes and balks
For lovers in their Sunday walks !
The daisy and the buttercup—
For which the laughing children stoop
A hundred times throughout the day,
In their rude romping summer play—
So thickly now the pasture crowd,
In a gold and silver sheeted cloud,
As if the drops of April showers
Had woo'd the sun and changed to flowers !

Birds hatch and rear their young principally during this month. The patience and assiduity of the female, during the task of sitting, is admirable; as well as the conjugal affection of the male, who sings to his mate, and often supplies her place; and nothing can exceed the parental tenderness of both, when the young are brought to light.

Hark! 'tis the hymn of Nature! Love-taught birds
Salute with songs of gratulation sweet,
The sweet May morning. How harmoniously
Over these meadows of the rising sun
The music floats! O Love! Love ever young!
On the soft bosom of the Spring reclined,
Nurse of the tender thought and generous deed!
Thou com'st to bless thy children. Let me drink
Thy waters of Elysium and bless thee:
Oft have I pass'd yon cottage door at eve
Where sat the swain, his daily labour done,
Nursing his little children on his knee,
And kissing them at times; while over him bent
His happy partner, smiling as she view'd
Her lisping babes; then have I blessed their love,
And fondly called thee Fount of Social Peace!

ELLIOTT.

The transition from the affections of the "winged creatures of the air" to domestic love, and the

little sketch of rural bliss with which this short extract concludes, is particularly fine.

Towards the end of May, the beehives send forth their earlier swarms. These colonies consist of the young progeny, now grown too numerous to remain in their parent-habitation, and sufficiently strong and vigorous to provide for themselves. One queen-bee is necessary to form each colony; and wherever she flies, they follow. Nature directs them to march in a body in quest of a new settlement, which, if left to their choice, would generally be some hollow trunk of a tree; but man, who converts the labours and instincts of so many animals to his own use, provides them with a more secure dwelling, and repays himself with their honey. There is something very picturesque in the manner of reclaiming the swarms of bees. Their departure is announced for a day or more before it takes place, by an unusual bustle and humming in the hive. Some person, commonly a boy, is set to watch; and the moment their flight is proclaimed, a ringing is commenced upon a pan, or fire-shovel, which, as country people say, *charms* them down. They alight, or, rather, the queen-bee alights upon the end of a

bough, and the rest of the bees clustering, or, as it is termed, *knitting*, about her, form a living, brown, dependent cone. Beneath this some adroit operator spreads a cloth (upon a table if one can be had), and holding an empty hive inverted under the swarm, suddenly shakes them into it, and places it, with all the captive colony in it, upon the cloth. In this state they are conveyed to the place they are intended to occupy; and the following morning they are found to have taken kindly to their new dwelling. The early swarms are generally the most valuable, as they have time enough to lay in a plentiful store of honey for their subsistence against the winter. In Warwickshire so well is this understood, that one of the popular rhymes runs—

A swarm of bees in May,
Is worth a load of hay;
A swarm of bees in June,
Is worth a silver spoon;
But a swarm of bees in July,
Is not worth a fly.

This month is not a very busy season for the farmer. In late years, some sowing remains to be done; and in forward ones the weeds which

spring up abundantly both in fields and gardens, require to be kept under. The husbandman now looks forward, with anxious hope, to the reward of his industry—

> Be gracious, Heaven! for, now laborious man
> Has done his part. Ye fostering breezes, blow!
> Ye softening dews, ye tender showers, descend!
> And temper all, thou world-reviving sun,
> Into the perfect year.

THOMSON.

Child of the sun, refulgent Summer comes,
In pride of youth, and felt through Nature's depth:
He comes attended by the sultry hours,
And ever-fanning breezes, on his way.

THOMSON.

JUNE.

It is now Summer :—

> 'Summer is ycomen in,
> Loud sing cuckoo,
> Groweth seed,
> And bloweth mead,
> And springeth the weed new.'

"Thus," says Leigh Hunt, "sings the oldest English song extant, in a measure which is its own music.—The temperature of the air, however, is still mild, and in our climate sometimes too chilly; but when the season is fine, this is, perhaps, the most delightful month of the year. The hopes of Spring are realized, yet the enjoyment is but commenced: we have all Summer before us; the cuckoo's two notes are now at what may be called their ripest—deep and loud; so is the hum of the bee; little clouds lie

in lumps of silver about the sky, and sometimes fall to complete the growth of the herbage; yet we may now lie down on the grass, or the flowery banks, to read or write; the grasshoppers click about us in the warming verdure, and the fields and the hedges are in full blossom with the clover, the still more exquisite bean, the pea, the blue and yellow nightshade, the foxglove, the mallow, white briony, wild honeysuckle, and the flower of the hip, or wild rose, which blushes through all the gradations of delicate red and white. The leaves of the hip, especially the young ones, are as beautiful as any garden rose. Towards evening the bat and the owl venture forth, flitting through the glimmering quiet; and at night the moon looks silvered, the sky at once darkest and clearest, and when the nightingale and other birds have done singing you may hear the undried brooks of the spring running and purling through their leafy channels."

June is really, in this climate, what the poets have fabled May to be—the most lovely month of the year, and to it may the descriptive line of the "Castle of Indolence" be very aptly applied—

> Half-prankt with Spring, with Summer half embrown'd.

In ordinary seasons, however, the heat this month rarely rises to excess, or interrupts the enjoyment of those pleasure which the scenes of nature now afford. The trees are in their fullest dress, and a profusion of the gayest flowers is every where scattered around.

In the early part of the month, when every tree and shrub seem to vie with each other in putting forth their "brightest, tenderest green," and the clear and glowing sun careers in the cloudless heaven, there are days unsurpassed in beauty even under Italian skies. How brightly and beautifully is one of these described in the following lines :—

'Twas a day
Of peerless beauty : like a bridegroom gay
Forth from his eastern chamber burst the sun
A victor crown'd ere half the goal was won ;
And, as he climb'd the heavens with giant stride,
Wide Nature shared his triumph and his pride.
Ah ! then it was, just at the witching time,
When early Summer steals on Spring's sweet prime,
And earth in scarce maturèd beauty drest,
All bloom, all verdure smiles and looks her best :
When warmer skies, with still attemper'd heat,
Seem gently to remind us shade is sweet—

Such sunny shade as June's young leaves can
throw,
When on the light breeze dancing to and fro.
RECOLLECTIONS OF THE LAKES.

Soft copious showers are extremely welcome towards the beginning of this month, to forward the growth of the herbage. Such a one is thus described by Thomson:—

Gradual sinks the breeze
Into a perfect calm; that not a breath
Is heard to quiver through the closing woods,
Or rustling turn the many-twinkling leaves
Of Aspen tall.
At last,
The clouds consign their treasures to the fields;
And, softly shaking on the dimpled pool
Prelusive drops, let all their moisture flow
In large effusion o'er the freshen'd world.
The stealing shower is scarce to patter heard,
By such as wander through the forest-walks,
Beneath the umbrageous multitude of leaves.
But who can hold the shade, while Heaven descends
In universal bounty, shedding herbs,
And fruits, and flowers, on Nature's ample lap?

"Spring," says one who has written finely of the seasons and their change, "Spring may now be considered as employed in completing her

toilet, and, for the first weeks of this month, putting on those last finishing touches which an accomplished beauty never trusts to any hand but her own. In the woods and the groves, also, she is still clothing some of her noblest and proudest attendants with their new annual attire. The oak until now has been nearly bare; and, of whatever age, has been looking old all the Winter and Spring on account of its crumpled branches and withered rind. Now, of whatever age, it looks young, in virtue of its new green, lighter than all the rest of the grove. Now, also, the stately walnut (standing singly or in pairs in the forecourt of ancient manor-houses, or in the home corner of the pretty park-like paddock, at the back of some modern Italian villa, whose white dome it saw rise beneath it the other day, and mistakes it for a mushroom) puts forth its smooth leaves slowly, as 'sage grave men' do their thoughts, and which over-caution reconciles one to the beating it receives in the Autumn as the best means of at once compassing its present fruit, and making it bear more; as its said prototypes, in animated nature, are obliged to have their brains cudgelled before any good can be got from them."

The two grand husbandry occupations of June

are hay-making and sheep-shearing. The first in order, and, indeed, the earliest rural employment of this month is the shearing of sheep, an affair of much importance in various parts of the kingdom, where wool is one of the most valuable products. England has for many ages been famous for its breeds of sheep, which yield wool of various qualities, suited to different branches of the woollen manufactory. The downs of Dorsetshire, and other southern and western counties, feed sheep, whose fine short fleeces are employed in making the best broad cloths. The coarser wool of Yorkshire, and the northern counties, is used in narrow cloths. The large Leicestershire and Lincolnshire sheep are clothed with long, thick flakes, proper for the hosier's use; and every other kind is valuable for some particular purpose.

The season for sheep-shearing commences as soon as the warm weather is so far settled that the sheep may, without danger, lay aside great part of their clothing. The following tokens are given by Dyer, in his "Fleece," to mark out the time:—

> If verdant alder spreads
> Her silver flowers; if humble daisies yield
> To yellow crowfoot and luxuriant grass;
> Gay shearing-time approaches.

Before shearing, the sheep undergo the operation of washing, in order to free the wool from the foulness it has contracted by its exposure to the influence of the weather and other sources of impurity :—

Upon the brim
Of a clear river gently drive the flock,
And plunge them one by one into the flood.
Plunged in the flood, not long the struggler sinks,
With his white flakes, that glisten through the tide;
The sturdy rustic, in the middle wave,
Awaits to see him rising; one arm bears
His lifted head above the limped stream,
While the full clammy fleece the other laves
Around, laborious, with repeated toil;
And then resigns him to the sunny bank,
Where, bleating loud, he shakes his dripping locks.

DYER.

The shearing itself is conducted with a degree of ceremony and rural dignity, and is a kind of festival, as well as a piece of labour.

At last of snowy white, the gather'd flocks
Are in the wattled pen innum'rous press'd,
Head above head; and ranged in lusty rows
The shepherds sit, and whet the sounding shears.
The housewife waits to roll her fleecy stores,
With all her gay-drest maids attending round.

One, chief, in gracious dignity enthroned,
Shines o'er the rest, the past'ral queen, and rays
Her smiles, sweet-beaming, on her shepherd-king.
A simple scene! yet hence Britannia sees
Her solid grandeur rise; hence she commands
The exalted stores of ev'ry brighter clime,
The treasures of the sun without his rage.

THOMSON.

A profusion of fragrance now arises from the fields of clover in flower. Of this plant there are the varieties of white and purple. The latter is sometimes called honeysuckle from the quantity of sweet juice contained in the tube of the flower, whence the bees extract much of their honey. A still more delicious odour proceeds from the beans in blossom; of which Thomson speaks in this rapturous language:—

Long let us walk
Where the breeze blows from yon extended field
Of blossom'd beans. Arabia cannot boast
A fuller gale of joy, than, lib'ral, thence
Breathes through the sense, and takes the ravish'd
soul.

In the hedges, the place of the hawthorn is supplied by the flowers of the hip, or dog-rose, the different hues of which, from a light blush to

a deep crimson, form, as has already been said, a most elegant variety of colour. Some time after, the woodbine, or honey-suckle, begins to blow; and this, united with the rose, gives our hedges their highest beauty and fragrance.

Stepping forth into the open fields, says one from whom we have already quoted, what a bright pageant of summer beauty is spread out before us! Everywhere about our feet flocks of wild flowers

Do paint the meadows with delight.

We must not stay to pluck and particularize them, for most of them have already had their greeting: let us pass along beside this flourishing hedgerow. The first novelty of the season that greets us here, is, perhaps, the sweetest, the freshest, the fairest of all, and the only one that could supply an adequate substitute for the hawthorn bloom, which it has superseded. Need the eglantine be named? —the sweet-leaved eglantine—the rain-scented eglantine—eglantine to which the sun himself pays homage by "counting his dewy rosary" on it every morning; — eglantine which Chaucer and even Shakspeare — but, hold! whatsoever the poets

themselves may insinuate to the contrary, to read poetry in the presence of nature is a kind of impiety; it is like reading the commentators on Shakspeare and skipping the text, for you cannot attend to both—to say nothing of nature's book being a *vade mecum* that can make "every man his own poet" for the time being; and there is, after all, no poetry like that which we create for ourselves.

The several kinds of corn come into ear and flower during this month; as do likewise numerous species of grass, all of which are, indeed, included in the same family of plants. It is peculiar to all this tribe to have long slender leaves, a jointed stalk, and a flowering head, either in the form of a close spike, like wheat, or a loose bunch, like oats. This head consists of numerous husky flowers, each of which bears a single seed.

In the larger kinds, which are usually termed *corn*, these seeds are big enough to be worth separating; and they form the chief article of food of almost all the civilized nations of the world. In Europe, the principal kinds of corn are wheat, rye, barley, and oats. In Asia, rice is

most cultivated. In Africa and the West Indies maize or Indian corn.

The smaller kinds, called *grasses*, are most valuable for their leaves and stalks, or herbage, which make the principal food of all domestic cattle. This cut down and dried, is *hay*, the winter provision of cattle in all the temperate and northern climates. Grass is most fit to cut after it is in ear, but before its seeds are ripened. If it be suffered to grow too ripe, it will lose all its nutritious juices, and become like the straw of corn. The latter part of June is the beginning of hay-harvest for the southern and middle parts of the kingdom. This is one of the busiest and most agreeable of rural occupations. Both sexes and all ages are engaged in it. The fragrance of the new-mown hay, the gaiety of all surrounding objects, and the genial warmth of the weather, all conspire to render it a season of pleasure and delight to the beholder.

Now swarms the village o'er the jovial mead:
The rustic youth, brown with meridian toil,
Healthful and strong: full as the summer rose,
Blown by prevailing suns, the ruddy maid,
Half-naked, swelling on the sight, and all

Her kindled graces burning o'er her cheek:
E'en stooping age is here; and infant hands
Trail the long rake, or, with the fragrant load
O'ercharged, amid the kind oppression roll.
Wide flies the tedded grain; all in a row
Advancing broad, or wheeling round the field,
They spread the breathing harvest to the sun,
That throws refreshful round a rural smell:
Or, as they rake the green-appearing ground,
And drive the dusky wave along the mead,
The russet haycock rises thick behind,
In order gay. While heard from dale to dale,
Waking the breeze, resounds the blended voice
Of happy labour, love, and social glee.

THOMSON.

"The hay-harvest, besides filling the whole air with its sweetness," says the author of the Mirror of the Months, "is even more picturesque in the appearances it offers, as well as more pleasant in the associations it calls forth, than the harvest in Autumn. What a delightful succession of pictures! First, the mowers, stooping over their scythes, and moving, with measured paces, through the early morning mists, interrupted, at intervals, by the freshening music of the whetstone. Then, blithe companies of both sexes, ranged in regular array, and moving lengthwise and

across the meadow, each with the same action, and the ridges rising or disappearing behind them as they go:—

There are forty *moving* like one.

Then, again, when the fragrant crop is nearly fit to be gathered in, and lies, piled up, in dusky-coloured hillocks upon the yellow sward, while here and there, beneath the shade of a 'hedge-row elm,' or braving the open sunshine in the centre of the scene, sunburnt groups are seated in circles at their noonday meal, enjoying that ease which nothing but labour can generate. And, lastly, when man and nature, mutually assisting each other, have completed the work of preparation, and the cart stands still to receive its last forkful; while the horse, almost hidden beneath his apparently overwhelming load, lifts up his patient head sideways to pick a mouthful, and all about stand the labourers, leaning listlessly on their implements, and eying the completion of their work. What sweet pastoral pictures are here! the last, in particular, is prettier to look upon than anything else, not excepting one of Wouvermann's imitations of it."

It is at this season that we can peculiarly feel the beauty of the charming lines of Milton :—

As one who, long in populous city pent,
Where houses thick and sewers annoy the air,
Forth issuing, on a summer's morn, to breathe
Among the pleasant villages and farms
Adjoin'd, from each thing met conceives delight;
The smell of grain, or tedded grass, or kine,
Or dairy, each rural sight, each rural sound.

On the twenty-first of June happens the *summer solstice*, or longest day. At this time, in the most northern parts of the island, there is scarcely any night, the twilight continuing almost from the setting to the rising of the sun; so that it is light enough at midnight to see to read. This season is also properly called *Midsummer*, though, indeed, the greatest heats are not yet arrived; and there is more warm weather after it than before.

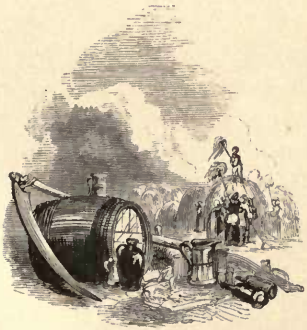
The principal season for taking that delicate fish, the mackerel, is in this month.

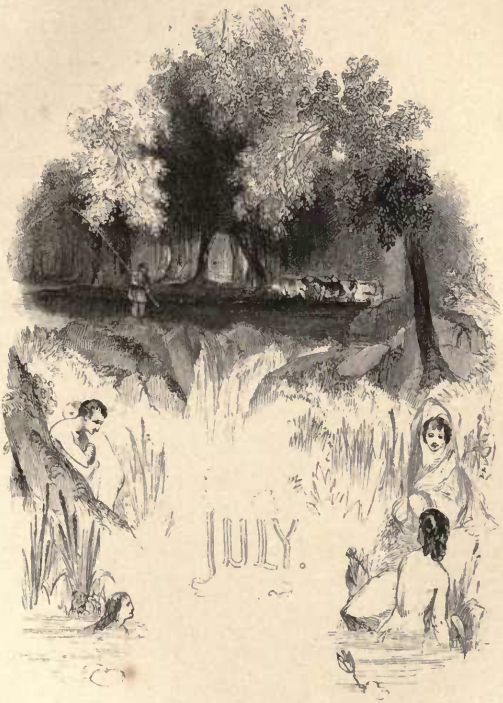
Currants and gooseberries begin to ripen about the end of June, and prove extremely refreshing as the parching heats increase.

Though the other senses are so much gratified

in this month, the ear loses most of its entertainment, as the birds, now that the season of courtship and rearing their young is past, no longer exercise their musical powers.

The groves, the fields, the meadows, now no more
With melody resound. 'Tis silence all,
As if the lovely songsters, overwhelm'd
By bounteous Nature's plenty, lay entranced
In drowsy lethargy.





Welcome ye shades! ye bowery thickets hail!
Ye lofty pines! ye venerable oaks!
Ye ashes wild resounding o'er the steep,
Delicious is your shelter to the soul,
As to the hunted hart the sallying spring.

THOMSON.

JULY.

Summer at last is come among us, and her whole world of wealth is spread out before us in prodigal array. "The woods and groves have darkened and thickened into one impervious mass of sober uniform green; and having, for a while, ceased to exercise the more active functions of the Spring, are resting from their labours in that state of 'wise passiveness' which we, in virtue of our infinitely greater wisdom, know so little how to enjoy. In Winter the trees may be supposed to sleep in a state of insensible inactivity, and in Spring to be labouring with the flood of new life that is pressing through their veins, and forcing them to perform the offices attached to their existence. But in Summer, having reached the middle term of their annual life, they pause in

their appointed course, and then, if ever, taste the nourishment they take in, and 'enjoy the air they breathe.' And he who, sitting in Summer time, beneath the shade of a spreading plane tree, can see its brave branches fan the soft breeze as it passes, and hear its polished leaves whisper and twitter to each other like birds at love-making, and yet can feel anything like an assurance that it does not enjoy its existence, knows little of the tenure by which he holds his own.

"Like the woods and groves, the hills and plains have now put off the bright green livery of Spring; but, unlike them, they have changed it for one dyed in almost as many colours as a harlequin's coat. The rye is yellow and almost ripe for the sickle. The wheat and barley are of a dull green, from their swelling ears being alone visible, as they bow before every breeze that blows over them. The oats are whitening apace, and quiver, each individual grain on its light stem, as they hang like rain-drops in the air. Looked on separately, and at a distance, these three now wear a somewhat dull and monotonous hue, when growing in great spaces; but this makes them contrast the more effectually with the many-coloured

patches that everywhere intermix with them, in an extensively open country; and it is in such a one that we should make our general observations at this finest period of all our year.

"What can be more beautiful to look on, from an eminence, than a great plain, painted all over with the party-coloured honours of the early portion of this month, when the all-pervading verdure of the Spring has passed away, and before the scorching heats of Summer have had time to prevail over the various tints and hues that have taken its place? The principal share of the landscape will probably be occupied by the sober hues of the above-named corns. But these will be intersected, in all directions, by patches of the brilliant emerald which now begins to spring afresh on the late-mown meadows; by the golden yellow of the rye, in some cases cut, and standing in sheaves; by the rich dark-green of the turnip-fields; and still more brilliantly, by sweeps, here and there, of the bright yellow charlock, the scarlet corn-poppy, and the blue succory, which, like perverse beauties, scatter the stray gifts of their charms in proportion as the soil cannot afford to support the expenses attendant on them."

July is the hottest month of the year. The direct influence of the sun, indeed, is continually diminishing after the summer solstice; but the earth and air have been so thoroughly heated, that the warmth which they retain more than compensates, for a time, for the diminution of solar rays. The effects of this weather upon the face of nature soon become manifest. All the flowers of the former month soon lose their beauty, shrivel, and fall; at the same time their leaves and stalks lose their verdure, and the whole plant hastens to decay. Many plants, however, do not begin to flower till July: these are, particularly the aromatic; the succulent, or thick-leaved; several of the aquatic, and of those called compound-flowered, in which many florets are collected into one head, as thistle, sow-thistle, hawkweed, &c. The lily is one of the principal ornaments of gardens in this month; and with its delicate white flowers gives an agreeable sensation of coolness to the eye.

The animal-creation seem oppressed with languor during this hot season, and either seek the recesses of woods, or resort to pools and streams, to cool their bodies, and quench their thirst.

On the grassy bank
Some ruminating lie; while others stand
Half in the flood, and, often bending, sip
The circling surface. In the middle droops
The strong laborious ox, of honest front,
Which incompos'd he shakes; and from his sides
The troublous insects lashes with his tail,
Returning still. Amid his subjects safe
Slumbers the monarch-swain; his careless arm
Thrown round his head on downy moss sustain'd,
Here laid his scrip, with wholesome viands fill'd,
There, listening every noise, his watchful dog.

THOMSON.

"Whoever would taste all the sweetness of July," says William Howitt, "let him go, in pleasant company if possible, into heaths and woods; it is there, in her uncultured haunts, that Summer now holds her court. The stern castle, the lowly convent, the deer, and the forester, have vanished thence many ages; yet nature still casts round the forest-lodge, the gnarled oak, and lonely mere, the same charms as ever. The most hot and sandy tracks, which, we might naturally imagine, would now be parched up, are in full glory. The Erica Tetralix, or bell-heath, the most beautiful of our indigenous species, is now in bloom, and has converted the brown bosom

of the waste into one wide sea of crimson: the air is charged with its honeyed odour; the dry elastic turf glows, not only with its flowers, but with those of the wild thyme, the clear blue milkwort, the yellow asphodel, and that curious plant, the sun-dew, with its drops of inexhaustible liquor sparkling in the fiercest sun like diamonds. There wave the cotton-rush, the tall foxglove, and the taller golden mullein; there grows the classical grass of Parnassus, the elegant favourite of every poet: there creep the various species of heathberries, cranberries, bilberries, etc., furnishing the poor with a source of profit, and the rich of simple luxury. What a pleasure it is to throw ourselves down beneath the verdant screen of the beautiful fern, or in the shade of a venerable oak, in such a scene, and listen to the Summer sound of bees, grasshoppers, and ten thousand other insects, mingled with the more remote and solitary cry of the peewit and curlew!"

Notwithstanding the heat has parched the songsters of the grove into silence, there is still an audible music in nature—

The gnats
Their murmuring small trumpets sounden wide.
SPENSER.

And John Keats points to another source of melody :—

> The poetry of earth is never dead;
> When all the birds are faint with the hot sun,
> And hide in cooling trees, a voice will run
> From hedge to hedge about the new-mown mead;
> That is the grasshopper's.
>
> KEATS.

The insect-tribe, however, are peculiarly active and vigorous in the hottest weather. These minute creatures are, for the most part, annual, being hatched in the Spring, and dying at the approach of Winter: they have therefore no time to lose in indolence, but must make the most of their short existence; especially as their most perfect state continues only during a part of their lives. How appropriately may Anacreon's celebrated address to the Cicada be applied to many of the happy creatures which sport in the sunshine—

> Blissful insect! what can be
> In happiness compared to thee?
> Fed with nourishment divine,
> The dewy morning's sweetest wine;
> Nature waits upon thee still,
> And thy fragrant cup does fill,

All the fields that thou dost see,
All the plants belong to thee;
All that Summer hours produce,
Fertile made with ripening juice;
Man for thee does sow and plough,
Farmer he, and landlord thou!
Thee the hinds with gladness hear,
Prophet of the ripen'd year!
To thee alone of all the earth,
Life is no longer than thy mirth:
Happy creature! happy thou,
Dost neither age nor winter know,
But when thou'st drank, and danced, and sung
Thy fill, the flow'ry leaves among,
Sated with the glorious feast,
Thou retir'st to endless rest.

All insects undergo three changes, in each of which they are transformed to a totally different appearance. From the egg, they first turn into *catterpillars* or *maggots*, when they crawl upon many feet, and are extremely voracious, many kinds of them doing much mischief in the gardens, and sometimes devouring the leaves of the trees, and even the herbage on the ground. This is their state in the Spring. They next become *aurelias* or *chrysalises*, when they resemble an infant closely wrapt in swaddling-clothes, being

motionless, taking no nourishment, and, indeed, having no appearance of living creatures. From this state they burst forth into the *perfect insect*, shining in all its colours, furnished with wings, full of activity, and feeding, for the most part, on thin liquid aliments, such as the honey of flowers and juices of animals. In this state most of them continue but a short time. Having deposited their eggs, and thus made provision for a succeeding generation, they decay and die, suffering as in the higher races of animated beings, notwithstanding what seems to us their brief existence, from all the decrepitude of age—

Waked by his warmer ray, the reptile young
Come wing'd abroad; by the light air upborne,
Lighter and full of soul. From every chink
And secret corner, where they slept away
The wintry storms; or rising from their tombs
To higher life; by myriads, forth at once,
Swarming they pour; of all the varied hues
Their beauty-beaming parent can disclose.
Ten thousand forms! ten thousand different tribes!
People the blaze. To sunny waters some
By fatal instinct fly; where on the pool
They sportive wheel; or, sailing down the stream,
Are snatch'd immediate by the quick-eyed trout,
Or darting salmon. Through the green-wood glade

Some love to stray; there lodged, amused, and fed,
In the fresh leaf. Luxurious, others make
The meads their choice, and visit every flower,
And every latent herb: for, the sweet task,
To propagate their kinds, and where to wrap,
In what soft beds, their young yet undisclosed,
Employs their tender care. Some to the house,
The fold, and dairy, hungry, bend their flight,
Sip round the pail, or taste the curdling cheese.

THOMSON.

About the middle of this month, the shoals of that migratory fish, the pilchard, begin to appear off the coast of Cornwall.

Now is to be enjoyed in all its luxury the delightful amusement of bathing; and happy is the swimmer, who alone is able to enjoy the full pleasure of this heathful exercise. The power of habit to improve the natural faculties is in nothing more apparent than in the art of swimming. Man, without practice, is utterly unable to support himself in the water. In these northern countries, the season for pleasant bathing being short, few in proportion can swim at all; and to those who have acquired the art, it is a laborious and fatiguing exercise. Whereas, in the tropical countries, where, from their very infancy, both

sexes are continually plunging into the water, they become a sort of amphibious creatures, swimming and diving with the utmost ease, and for hours together, without intermission. Thomson finely describes this delightful recreation—

> The sprightly youth
> Speeds to the well-known pool, whose crystal depth
> A sandy bottom shows. Awhile he stands
> Gazing the inverted landscape, half afraid
> To meditate the blue profound below;
> Then plunges headlong down the circling flood.
> His ebon tresses, and his rosy cheek
> Instant emerge; and through the obedient wave,
> At each short breathing by his lip repell'd,
> With arms and legs according well, he makes,
> As humour leads, an easy-winding path;
> While, from his polish'd sides, a dewy light
> Effuses on the pleased spectators round.
>
> THOMSON.

The excessive heats of this period of the year cause such an evaporation from the surface of the earth and waters, that, after some continuance of dry weather, large heavy clouds are formed, which at length let fall their collected moisture in extremely copious showers, which frequently beat down the full-grown corn, and sometimes deluge the country with sudden floods. Thunder

and lightning generally accompany these Summer storms. Lightning is a collection of electric fire drawn from the heated air and earth, and accumulated in the clouds, which, at length overcharged, suddenly let go their contents in the form of broad flashes, or fiery darts. These are attracted again by the earth, and often intercepted by buildings, trees, and other elevated objects, which are shattered by the shock. Thunder is the noise occasioned by the explosion, and therefore always *follows* the lightning; the sound travelling slower to our ears than the light to our eyes. When we hear the thunder, therefore, all danger from that flash of lightning is over; and thunder, though so awful and tremendous to the ear, is of itself entirely harmless.

An American poet finely describes a sultry July day, and the welcome approach of a Summer's breeze—

The sun has drank
The dew that lay upon the morning grass;
There is no rustling in the lofty elm
That canopies my dwelling, and its shade
Scarce cools me. All is silent, save the faint
And interrupted murmur of the bee,
Settling on the sick flowers, and then again

Instantly on the wing. The plants around
Feel the too potent fervours: the tall maize
Rolls up its long green leaves; the clover droops
Its tender foliage, and declines its blooms.
But far in the fierce sunshine tower the hills,
With all their growth of woods, silent and stern,
As if the scorching heat and dazzling light
Were but an element they loved. Bright clouds,
Motionless pillars of the brazen heaven—
Their bases on the mountains—their white tops
Shining in the far ether—fire the air
With a reflected radiance, and make turn
The gazer's eye away. For me, I lie
Languidly in the shade, where the thick turf
Yet verges from the kisses of the sun,
Retains some freshness, and I woo the wind
That still delays its coming. Why so slow,
Gentle and voluble spirit of the air?
O come and breathe upon the fainting earth
Coolness and life. Is it that in his caves
He hears me? See on yonder woody ridge
The pine is bending his proud top; and now,
Among the nearer groves, chesnut and oak
Are tossing their green boughs about. He comes!
Lo, where the grassy meadow runs in waves!
The deep distressful silence of the scene
Breaks up with mingling of unnumber'd sounds
And universal motion. He is come,
Shaking a shower of blossoms from the shrubs
And bearing on their fragrance: and he brings

Music of birds, and rustling of green boughs,
And sound of swaying branches, and the voice
Of distant waterfalls. All the green herbs
Are stirring in his breath; a thousand flowers,
By the road-sides and borders of the brook,
Nod gaily to each other; glossy leaves
Are twinkling in the sun, as if the dew
Were on them yet, and silver waters break
Into small waves, and sparkle as he comes.

BRYANT.

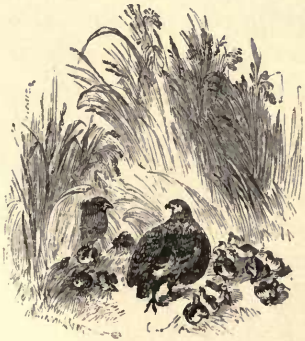
The effects of the great heat on the human body are agreeably allayed, by the various wholesome fruits which Providence offers at this season for the use of man. Those which are now ripe are of all the most cooling and refreshing—as currants, gooseberries, raspberries, strawberries, and cherries. These are no less salutary and useful than the richest products of the warmer climates.

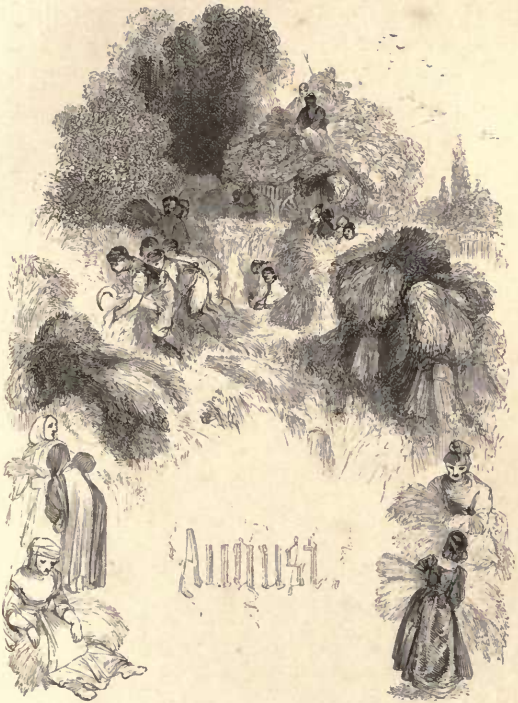
Hens moult, or lose their feathers, during this month. The smaller birds do not moult so early; but all renew their plumage before Winter, when they are in their finest and warmest clothing, and the young partridges are found running about among the corn.

The farmer's chief employment in July, is

getting home the various products of the earth. It is the principal hay-month in the northern parts of the kingdom, and the work people suffer much fatigue from the excessive heat to which they are exposed.

The corn-harvest begins in July in the southern parts of the island; but August is the principal harvest-month for the whole kingdom.





See how broad noon,
With fervid glare, broods o'er yon sloping field,
Now "white to harvest:" yet another moon
And then shall Plenty's copious horn be filled
With golden fruits from Spring's fair blossoms won.

MRS. HEY.

AUGUST.

August is that debateable ground of the year, says an anonymous writer, to whose full and poetical descriptions we have oftener than once had recourse—August is that debateable ground of the year which is situated exactly upon the confines of Summer and Autumn; and it is difficult to say which has the better claim to it. It is dressed in half the flowers of the one, and half the fruits of the other; and it has a sky and temperature all its own, and which vie in beauty with those of the Spring. May itself can offer nothing so sweet to the senses, so enchanting to the imagination, and so soothing to the heart, as that genial influence which arises from the sights, the sounds, and the associations, connected with an August evening in the country, when the occupa-

tions and pleasures of the day are done, and when all, even the busiest, are fain to give way to that "wise passiveness," one hour of which is rife with more real enjoyment than a whole season of revelry.

The whole face of nature has undergone, since last month, an obvious change; obvious to those who delight to observe all her changes and operations, but not sufficiently striking to insist on being seen generally by those who can read no characters but such as are written in a *text* hand. If the general *colours* of all the various departments of natural scenery are not changed, their *hues* are; and if there is not yet observable the infinite variety of Autumn, there is as little the extreme monotony of Summer. In one department, however, there *is* a general change that cannot well remain unobserved. The rich and unvarying green of the corn-fields has entirely and almost suddenly changed to a still richer and more conspicuous gold-colour; more conspicuous on account of the contrast it now offers to the lines, patches, and masses of green with which it everywhere lies in contact, in the form of intersecting hedge-rows, intervening meadows, and

bounding masses of forest. These latter are changed too; but in hue alone, not in colour. They are all of them still green, but it is not the fresh and tender green of the Spring, nor the full and satisfying, though somewhat dull, green of the Summer; but many greens, that blend all those belonging to the seasons just named, with others at once more grave and more bright; and the charming variety and interchange of which are peculiar to this delightful month, and are more beautiful in their general effect than those of either of the preceding periods; just as a truly beautiful woman is, perhaps, more beautiful at the period immediately before that at which her charms begin to wane, than she ever was before. Here, however, the comparison must end; for with the year its incipient decay is the signal for it to put on more and more beauties daily, till when it reaches the period at which it is on the point of sinking into the temporary death of Winter, it is more beautiful in general appearance than ever.

In the beginning of this month, the weather is still hot, and usually calm and fair. What remained to be perfected by the powerful influence

of the sun, is daily advancing to maturity. The farmer now sees the principal object of his culture, and the chief source of his riches, waiting only for the hand of the gatherer. Of the several kinds of grain, rye and oats are usually the first ripened; but this varies according to the time of sowing; and some of every species may be seen fit for cutting at the same time—

Hark! where the sweeping scythe now rips along:
Each sturdy mower emulous and strong,
Whose writhing form meridian heat defies,
Bends o'er his work, and every sinew tries;
Prostrates the waving treasure at his feet,
But spares the rising clover short and sweet.
Come, health! come, jollity! light-footed come;
Here hold your revels, and make this your home,
Each heart awaits and hails you as its own;
Each moisten'd brow, that scorns to wear a frown:
The unpeopled dwelling mourns its tenants stray'd;
E'en the domestic laughing dairymaid
Hies to the field, the general toil to share.
Meanwhile the farmer quits his elbow-chair,
His cool brick-floor, his pitcher, and his ease,
And braves the sultry beams, and gladly sees
His gates thrown open, and his team abroad,
The ready group attendant on his word,
To turn the swarth, the quivering load to rear,
Or ply the busy rake, the land to clear.

BLOOMFIELD.

Every fine day is now of great importance; since, when the corn is once ripe, it is liable to continual damage while standing, either from the shedding of the seeds, from the depredations of birds, or from storms. The utmost diligence is therefore used by the careful husbandman to get it in, and labourers are hired from all quarters to hasten the work—

> Pour'd from the villages, a numerous train
> Now spreads o'er all the fields. In form'd array
> The reapers move, nor shrink from heat or toil,
> By emulation urged. Others, dispersed,
> Or bind in sheaves, or load, or guide the wain,
> That tinkles as it passes. Far behind,
> Old age and infancy, with careful hand,
> Pick up each straggling ear.

This pleasing harvest-scene is beheld in its perfection only in the open-field countries, where the sight can take in at once an uninterrupted extent of land waving with corn, and a multitude of people engaged in the various parts of the labour. It is a prospect equally delightful to the eye and the heart, and which ought to inspire every sentiment of benevolence to our fellow-creatures, and gratitude to our Creator—

Soon as the morning trembles o'er the sky,
And, unperceived, unfolds the spreading day;
Before the ripen'd field the reapers stand,
In fair array, each by the lass he loves,
To bear the rougher part, and mitigate,
By nameless gentle offices, her toil.
At once they stoop, and swell the lusty sheaves;
While through their cheerful band the rural talk,
The rural scandal, and the rural jest,
Fly harmless, to deceive the tedious time,
And steal unfelt the sultry hours away.
Behind the master walks, builds up the shocks,
And, conscious, glancing oft on every side
His sated eye, feels his heart heave with joy.
The gleaners spread around, and here and there,
Spike after spike, their sparing harvest pick.
Be not too narrow, husbandman! but fling
From the full sheaf, with charitable stealth,
The liberal handful. Think, oh! grateful think!
How good the God of harvest is to you;
Who pours abundance o'er your flowing fields;
While these unhappy partners of your kind
Wide-hover round you, like the fowls of heaven,
And ask their humble dole.

THOMSON.

In a late season, or where favourable opportunities of getting in the harvest have been neglected, the corn on the ground often suffers greatly from heavy storms of wind and rain. It

is beaten to the earth; the seeds are shed, or rotted by the moisture; or, if the weather continues warm, the corn *grows*, that is, the seeds begin to germinate and put out shoots. Grain in this state is sweet and moist; it soon spoils on keeping; and bread made from it is clammy and unwholesome.

Harvest concludes with the field peas and beans, which are suffered to become quite dry and hard before they are cut down. The blackness of the bean pods-and stalks is disagreeable to the eye, though the crop is valuable to the farmer. In these countries they are used as food for cattle only, as the nourishment they afford, though strong, is gross and heavy.

The rural festival of *harvest-home* is an extremely natural one, and has been observed in almost all ages and countries. What can more gladden the heart than to see the long-expected products of the year, which have been the cause of so much anxiety, now safely housed, and beyond the reach of injury?

Inwardly smiling, the proud farmer views
The rising pyramids that grace his yard,

And counts his large increase; his barns are stored,
And groaning staddles bend beneath their load.

SOMERVILLE.

Harvest-home is still the great rural holiday in England, because it concludes at once the most laborious and the most lucrative of the farmers' employments, and unites repose and profit. Thank heaven, there are, and must be, seasons of some repose on agricultural employments, or the countryman would work with as unceasing a madness, and contrive to be almost as diseased and unhealthy as the citizen. But here, again, our holiday-making is not what it was. Our ancestors used to burst into an enthusiasm of joy at the end of harvest, and appear even to have mingled their previous labour with considerable merry-making, in which they imitated the equality of the earlier ages. They crowned the wheat-sheaves with flowers; they sung, they shouted, they danced; they invited each other, or met to feast, as at Christmas, in the halls of rich houses, and what was a very amiable custom, and wise beyond the commoner wisdom that may seem to be on the top of it, every one that had been concerned, man, woman, and child, received a little

present—ribbons, laces, or sweetmeats. It is right that the poor labourer, who has toiled in securing another's wealth, should partake of the general happiness. The jovial harvest-supper cheers his heart—

> From chilling want and guilty murmurs free;
>
> BLOOMFIELD.

and prepares him unrepiningly to begin the labours of another year.

This month is a season of another kind of harvest in some parts of England, which is the *hop-picking*. The hop is a climbing plant, sometimes growing wild in hedges, and cultivated on account of its use in making malt liquors. The plants are placed in regular rows, and poles set for them to run upon. When the poles are covered to the top, nothing can present a more elegant appearance than one of these hop-gardens. At the time of gathering, the poles are taken up with the plants clinging to them, and the scaly flowering heads, which is the part used, are carefully picked off. These are a finely-flavoured bitter, which they readily impart to hot water. They improve the taste of beer, and make it keep

better. Kent, Sussex, and Worcester, are the counties most famous for the growth of hops.

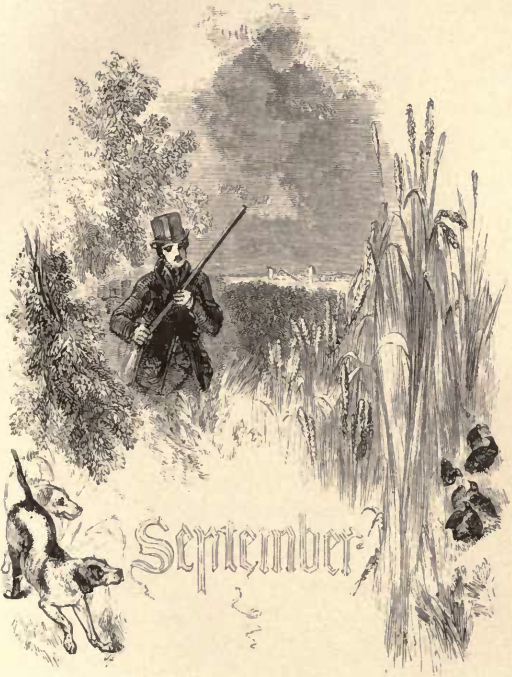
The number of plants in flower is now very sensibly diminished. Those of the former months are running fast to seed; and few new ones replace them. The uncultivated heaths and commons are now, however, in their chief beauty, from the flowers of the different kinds of heath or ling, with which they are covered, so as to spread a rich purple hue over the whole ground. Many of the fern tribe now show the rusty-coloured dots on the back of the leaves, which are their parts of fructification.

Some of the choicest wall-fruits are now coming into season—

> The sunny wall
> Where Autumn basks, with fruit empurpled deep,
> Presents the downy peach, the shining plum,
> The ruddy fragrant nectarine, and, dark
> Beneath his ample leaf, the luscious fig.
> The vine, too, here her curling tendrils shoots,
> Hangs out her clusters, glowing to the south,
> And scarcely wishes for a warmer sky.
>
> THOMSON.

About the middle of August, the largest of

the swallow tribe, the swift, or long-wing, disappears. Nearly at the same time, rooks no longer pass the nights from home, but roost in their nest-trees, and the red-breast, one of the finest, though commonest songsters, renews his music about the end of the month.



Through greyish mists behold September dawns,
And to his sport the wily fowler hies;
Crouching to earth his guileful pointer fawns;
Now the thick stubble, now the clover tries,
To find where with his race the luckless partridge lies.

SEPTEMBER.

An American poet has finely compared this month to the decline of day—

> The sultry summer past, September comes,
> Soft twilight of the slow-declining year;
> All mildness, soothing loneliness, and peace;
> The fading season ere the falling come,
> More sober than the buxom, blooming May,
> And, therefore, less the favourite of the world,
> But dearest month of all to pensive minds.
>
> Wilcox.

I am sorry to mention it, says the author of "The Mirror of the Months," but the truth must be told, even in a matter of age. The year, then, is on the wane. It is "declining into the vale" of months. It has reached "a certain age." It has reached the summit of the hill, and is not only

looking, but descending into the valley below. But, unlike that into which the life of man declines, this is not a vale of tears; still less does it, like that, lead to that inevitable bourne, the kingdom of the grave. For though it may be called, I hope without the semblance of profanation, "the valley of the shadow of death," yet of death itself it knows nothing. No—the year steps onward towards its temporary decay, if not so rejoicingly, even more majestically and gracefully than it does towards its revivification. And if September is not so bright with promise, and so buoyant with hope as May, it is even more embued with that spirit of serene repose, in which the only true, because the only continuous enjoyment consists. Spring "never *is* but always *to be* blest;" but September is the month of consummations,—the fulfiller of all promises—the fruition of all hopes—the era of all completeness.

Keats has some fine verses addressed to Autumn.

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
  Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
  With fruit, the vines that round the thatch-eaves run;

To bend with apples the moss'd cottage trees,
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core.

* * * *

Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?
Think not of them, thou hast thy music too;
White barr'd clouds bloom the soft dying day,
And touch the stubble plains with rosy hue.
Then, in a wailful choir, the small gnats mourn
Among the river sallows; borne aloft
Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;
And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourne;
Hedge-crickets sing; and now, with treble soft,
The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft;
And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.

JOHN KEATS.

September is, in general, a very agreeable month, the distinguishing softness and serenity of "fruit-fed Autumn," with its deep blue skies, prevailing through great part of it. The days are now very sensibly shortened—

Soon
The shades of twilight follow hazy noon;

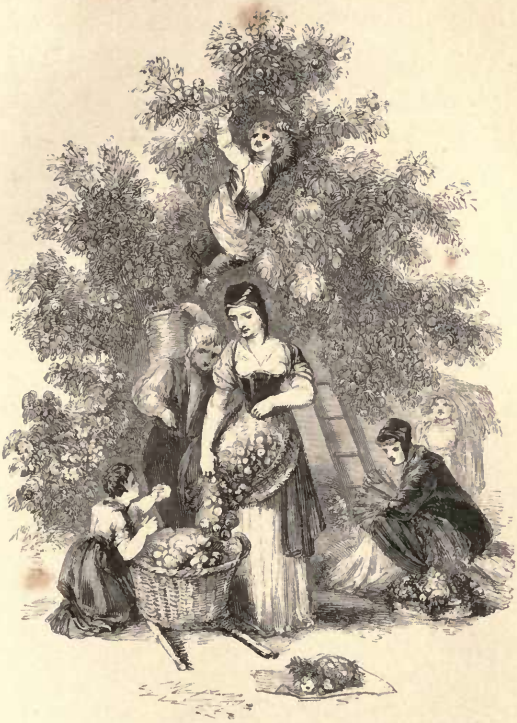
BLOOMFIELD.

and the mornings and evenings are chill and damp, though the warmth is still considerable in the middle of the day. This variation of tem-

perature is one cause why Autumn is an unhealthy time, especially in the warmer climates, and in moist situations. Those who are obliged to be abroad early or late in this season, should be guarded, by warm clothing, against the cold fogs.

In late years, a good deal of corn is still abroad, especially in the northern parts of the island, at the beginning of September; but it is supposed that, in general, all will be got in, or at least cut, by this time; for the first of the month is the day on which it is allowed by law to begin shooting partridges. These birds make their nests in corn-fields, where they bring up their young, which run after the parents like chickens. While the corn is standing, they have a safe refuge in it; but after harvest, when the sportsman may freely range over the stubble, they are either obliged to take to the wing, and offer themselves to his aim, or are surrounded by nets on the ground, and thus taken in whole coveys:

In his mid-career, the spaniel struck,
Stiff, by the tainted gale, with open nose,
Outstretch'd, and finely sensible, *draws* full,
Fearful and cautious, on the latent prey;
As in the sun the circling covey bask



AUTUMN.

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
  Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun,
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
  With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves run;
To bend with apples the moss'd cottage trees,
  And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core.

KEATS.

Their varied plumes, and, watchful every way,
Through the rough stubble turn the secret eye.
THOMSON.

A remarkable product of the earth collected in this month is *saffron*. This is cultivated in various parts of Europe; but none is superior to that grown in England, chiefly in the counties of Essex and Cambridge. The saffron-plant is a species of crocus, which is planted in July, and the flowers gathered in September. The part which alone is used, is the fine-branched filaments on the inside of the flower, called the chives. It is properly an expansion of the *pistil*, or part of fructification. These are picked off, dried, and pressed together into cakes. They are of a high orange-colour, and have a very strong aromatic odour. Saffron is used in medicine as a cordial; and its flavour was formerly much esteemed in cookery. The clown in the "Winter's Tale," reckoning up what he is to buy for the sheep-shearing feast, mentions "saffron to colour the warden-pies." It gives a fine deep yellow dye. The Autumnal crocus, or meadow saffron, is found wild in moist pastures, to which its delicate purple flowers give an appearance truly

beautiful. In such situations, however, it is a dangerous inhabitant, its leaves acting on cattle as a most virulent poison, and great numbers have been destroyed by eating it. At the time, however, when it lends its gay appearance to the meadows no danger is to be apprehended, as it has the remarkable property of putting forth its flower in the Autumn, while the leaf, which alone is injurious, and the fruit do not appear till the following Spring.

Very few other flowers open in this month; and it is to the ripening fruits that we are chiefly indebted for variegation of colour in the landscape of Nature. "The oaks and the beeches," says Leigh Hunt, "shed their nuts which, in the forests that still remain, particularly in the New Forest, in Hampshire, furnish a luxurious repast for the swine who feast of an evening, in as pompous a manner as any alderman, to the sound of the herdsman's horn. But the acorn must not be undervalued because it is food for swine, nor thought only robustly of because it furnishes our ships with timber. It is also one of the most beautiful objects of its species, protruding its glossy green nut from its rough and sober-coloured cup,

and dropping it in a most elegant manner beside the sunny and jagged leaf. We have seen a few of them, with their stems in water, make a handsome ornament to a mantel-piece in this season of departing flowers."

"The few additional flowers this month," continues the same writer, "are corn-flowers, Guernsey-lilies, and starwort. The fresh trees and shrubs in flower are bramble, chaste-tree, lauristinus, ivy, wild honeysuckle, spirea, and arbutus, or strawberry tree, a favourite of Virgil, which, like the garden of Alcinous, in Homer, produces flower and fruit at once. The stone-curlew clamours at the beginning of this month, wood-owls hoot, the ring-ouzel re-appears, the saffron butterfly is seen, and hares congregate."

The labours of the husbandman have but a very short intermission; for no sooner is the harvest gathered in, than the fields are again ploughed up and prepared for the winter corn, rye and wheat, which are sown during this month and the next.

Early in September, a harvest of a peculiar kind is offered to the inhabitants of our sea-coasts, in the immense shoals of herrings, which

approach the shores preparatory to the great operation of spawning. Our older writers on Natural History abound with minute accounts of the fancied migrations of this fish from the depths of the Polar ocean to our own shores. One writer, indeed, who, for a time, passed for an oracle on all matters connected with this subject, minutely describes their march in all its pomp and circumstance, as if he had been an eye-witness of the scene. More minute observation, however, proves that the herring seldom removes far from our shores. After the operation of spawning is over, it again retires to the deep water to recover its strength and feed till nature, or the instinct originally implanted in it by its omnipotent Creator, once more recalls it to the shore. Yarmouth is the principal station in England whence the fishermen proceed in search of this valuable booty.

"This is the month," says Leigh Hunt, "of the migration of birds, of the finished harvest, of nut-gathering, of cyder and perry-making, and, towards the conclusion, of the change of colour in the trees. The swallows, and many other soft-billed birds, that feed on insects, disappear for the

warmer climates, leaving only a few stragglers behind, probably from weakness, or sickness, who hide themselves in caverns and other sheltered places, and occasionally appear upon warm days." The preparations for migration by the swallow tribe are peculiarly interesting. For some time before their departure, they begin to collect in flocks, settling on trees, basking on the roofs of buildings, or gathering round towers and steeples, whence they take short excursions, as if to try their power of flight—

When Autumn scatters his departing gleams,
Warn'd of approaching Winter, gather'd, play
The swallow people; and toss'd wide around
O'er the calm sky, in convolution swift,
The feather'd eddy floats: rejoicing once,
Ere to their wintry slumbers they retire:
In clusters clung, beneath the mould'ring bank,
And where, unpierced by frosts, the cavern sweats.
Or, rather, into warmer climes convey'd,
With other kindred birds of season, there
They twitter cheerful, till the vernal months
Invite them welcome back: for, thronging, now
Innumerous wings are in commotion all.

THOMSON.

Mr. Jesse, a close observer of the habits of

animals, remarks that when swallows, in his neighbourhood, are about to emigrate "they take two or three flights to some height in the air, returning each time to settle on the aits or banks of the Thames. When about to take their final departure, they wheel round and round in the air, mounting higher and higher, till they can no longer be seen, and but few stragglers are left behind." The migration of swallows is now a well established fact in Natural History. That the notion of their retiring to caverns, or sinking to the bottom of ponds, there to remain during the winter, could obtain belief, seems almost incredible. Yet Gilbert White, the amiable naturalist of Selborne, seems to have been a firm believer in it to the end of his life!

On the other hand, some birds arrive at this season from still more northerly countries to spend the winter with us. The fieldfare and red-wing, whose departure was mentioned in March, return about the end of September. They feed chiefly on the berries with which our woods and hedges are plentifully stored all the winter.

Those sweet and mellow-toned songsters, the

wood-lark, thrush, and blackbird, now begin their autumnal music—

In the last days of Autumn, when the corn
Lies sweet and yellow in the harvest-field,
And the gay company of reapers bind
The bearded wheat in sheaves; then peals abroad
The blackbird's merry chant. I love to hear,
Bold plunderer, thy mellow burst of song
Float from thy watch-place, on the mossy tree
Close to the corn-field edge.

McLellan.

The most useful fruit this country affords, the apple, successively ripens, according to its different kinds, from July to September or October; but the principal harvest of them is about the close of this month. They are now gathered for our English vintage, the *cider-making*, which, in some counties, is a busy and important employment.

The apples are taken, either fresh from the tree, or after they have lain awhile to mellow, and crushed in a mill, and then pressed, till all their juice is extracted. This is set to ferment, whence it becomes *cider*, which may properly be called *apple-wine*. Pears treated in the same manner yield a vinous liquor, called *perry*. These

are the common drink in the counties where they are chiefly made.

Another agreeable product, both of our thickets and gardens, the hazel-nut, is fit for gathering at this time, and few rural pleasures afford more enjoyment. How redolent of delightful recollections are these nutting parties, when deep in the tangled copse we tear from the yielding boughs their rich brown clusters, or wander amid the stately trees, watching the squirrel flitting from branch to branch, or gazing in irate inquisitiveness on the unwelcome intruders into its forest sanctuary!

> Ye virgins, come. For you their latest song
> The woodlands raise; the clustering nuts for you
> The lover finds amid the secret shade;
> And, where they burnish on the topmost bough,
> With active vigour crushes down the tree,
> Or shakes them ripe from the resigning husk.
>
> THOMSON.

The autumnal equinox, when day and night are again equal over the whole globe, happens about the twenty-third of September. This, as well as the vernal, is generally attended with storms, which throw down much of the fruit yet remaining on the trees. The month—

Is now far spent; and the meridian sun
Most sweetly smiling, with attemper'd beams
Sheds gently down a mild and grateful warmth;
Beneath its yellow lustre, groves and woods,
Checker'd, by one night's frost, with various hues,
While yet no wind has swept a leaf away,
Shine doubly rich. It were a sad delight
Down the smooth stream to glide, and see it tinged
Upon each brink with all the gorgeous hues,
The yellow, red, or purple of the trees
That singly, or in tufts, or forests thick,
Adorn the shores; to see, perhaps, the side
Of some high mount reflected far below,
With its bright colours intermix'd with spots
Of darker green. Yes, it were sweetly sad
To wander in the open fields, and hear,
E'en at this hour, the noon-day hardly past,
The lulling insects of the Summer's night;
To hear, where lately buzzing swarms were heard,
A lonely bee, long roving here and there
To find a single flower, but all in vain;
Then rising quick, and with a louder hum,
In windening circles round and round his head,
Straight by the listener flying clear away,
As if to bid the fields a last adieu;
To hear, within the woodland's sunny side,
Late full of music, nothing save, perhaps,
The sound of nut-shells, by the squirrel dropp'd
From some tall beech, fast falling through the leaves.

WILCOX.

The author of "Recollections of the Lakes" thus finely describes an autumnal morning—

'Twas a morn
Such as you oft may see at Autumn's close:
A calm that might be felt; a brooding calm
Oppressively intense pervaded all.
The yellow leaves that seem'd to woo the breeze,
To lay them, with their fellows, on the ground,
Were dangling from their wither'd, sapless stems;
The large, full "beaded drops," half dew, half rain,
Seem'd, from the cottage-eaves, to hang self-poised,
As in defiance of philosophy.
The sullen sky wore one dull tint of grey,
Through which the imprison'd sun, "shorn of his beams,"
Gleam'd like a silver shield; while the still lake
Look'd as 'twere changed to crystal by the wand
Of wonder-working fairy: not a shrub,
Or leaf of feathery-fern, or blade of grass,
But was reflected with such truthfulness
In that calm, waveless mirror, that the eye,
Still baffled, still deceived, soon fail'd to trace
The limits of the diverse elements,
Nor what was liquid, what was solid knew.

Equally beautiful is the same writer's apostrophe to Autumn—

Thou gentlest teacher of unwelcome truths,
Pale, pensive Autumn; thee once more I hail.
The changing foliage of the forest trees,

The litter'd garden strew'd with wither'd leaves;
Thy little laureat's tributary lay,
Half sad, half cheerful, and this breathless calm,
All speak thy monitory reign begun;
And dearly do I love thy warning tones,
Thy gentle gravity, thy chasten'd smile:
Spring comes, the harbinger of glorious things,
But oft from very waywardness of mood,
She mars her message in the telling o't.
To Winter harsher tidings are assign'd,
And in such savage sort he thunders forth
His thrilling tale of change, and blight, and death;
We turn away abhorrent from the theme:
Thine, too, meek Autumn, is no mirthful task,
For thou com'st, charged with sad moralities;
But, oh! whilst faithful to thy sacred trust,
So gently deal'st thou with the human heart,
We almost love thy tidings for thy sake.
When Hope and Fancy spread before our gaze,
A long perspective of unclouded years,
Till through false optics view'd, the future seems
As certain, and far brighter than the past;
Thou, half reluctant, drop'st upon our path
A sered leaf, mayhap, or wither'd flower,
And leavest us, when time and leisure serve,
The symbol to interpret and apply.

By the end of this month, the leaves of many trees have their verdure impaired, and begin to put on their autumnal colours; which, however, are not complete till the ensuing month.

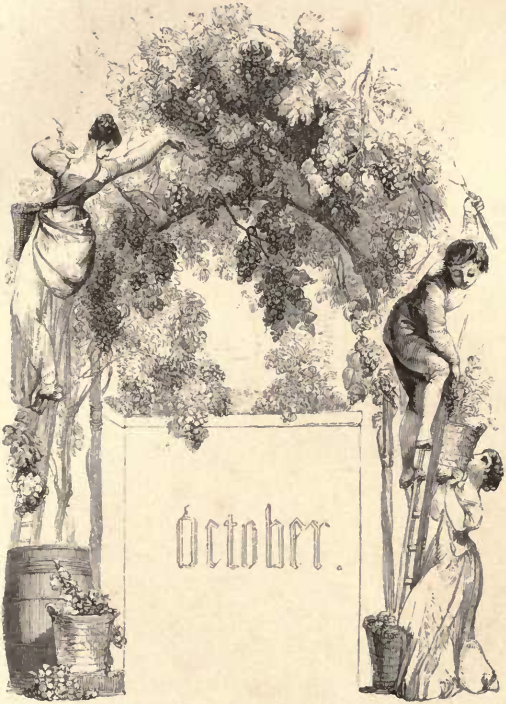
Leigh Hunt remarks, that although the mornings and evenings of September are apt to be foggy and chill, it is generally a serene and pleasant month, partaking of the warmth of summer and the vigour of Autumn. "But its noblest feature is a certain festive abundance for the supply of all the creation. There is grain for men, birds, and horses, hay for cattle, loads of fruit on the trees, and swarms of fish in the ocean. If the soft-billed birds, which feed on insects, miss their usual supply, they find it in the southern countries, and leave one's sympathy to be pleased with an idea that repasts apparently more harmless are alone offered to the creation upon our temperate soil. The feast, as the philosophic poet says on a higher occasion—

The feast is such as earth, the general mother,
  Pours on her fairest bosom when she smiles
In the embrace of Autumn. To each other,
  As some fond parent fondly reconciles
Her warring children, she their wrath beguiles
  With their own sustenance; they relenting weep.
Such is this festival, which from their isles,
  And continents, and winds, and oceans deep;
All shapes may throng to share, that fly, or walk, or
  creep. SHELLEY.

By the close of the month the advancing season has almost stripped the garden bare of its flowers. We may therefore conclude our notice of September with the following beautiful comparison:—

The heart's affections—are they not like flowers?
In life's first Spring they blossom; Summer comes
And 'neath the scorching blaze they droop apace,
Autumn revives them not; in languid groups
They linger still perchance, by grove or stream;
But Winter frowns and gives them to the winds:
They are all wither'd!

H. G. Bell.



The sere leaf flitting on the blast,
  The hips and haws on every hedge,
Bespeak October come! At last
  We stand on Winter's crumbling edge!
Like Nature's opening grave we eye
The two brief months not yet gone by.

BERNARD BARTON.

OCTOBER.

October may, upon the whole, be designated a melancholy month—more, however, from the associations of ideas which it suggests than from any peculiarity in the state of the atmosphere in which it is enshrouded. A chronicler of the months has remarked that "October bears pretty much the same character in the fall of the year as April does in the Spring." This, however, is only partially correct. We have, indeed, in October, clear skies and fogs; drought and rain; sunshine and storm; but their succession is more sedate, their alternations more matron-like than the girlish fickleness and changefulness of April; nor is the effect on the mind less striking. In April, with its sunshine and its showers, we are conscious of an elasticity of feeling, and are ready

to spring forward to meet the advances of the glorious Summer. In October, on the contrary, the mind naturally gives way to a feeling of repose, "calm contemplation and poetic ease." Dr. Drake, in his "Evenings in Autumn," has some fine reflections on this subject. "It is," says he, "as combining the decline of the day with that of the year, the period both of beauty and decay, that an evening in Autumn becomes so generally the parent of ideas of a solemn and pathetic cast. Not only, as in the first of these instances, do we blend the sunset of physical with that of moral being, but a further source of similitude is unavoidably suggested in the failure and decrepitude of the dying year, a picture faithfully, and, in some points of view, mournfully emblematic of the closing hours of human life.

"With the daily retirement of the sun, and the gradual approach of twilight, though circumstances, as we have seen, often associated in our minds with the transitory tenure of mortal existence, there are usually connected so many objects of beauty and repose as to render such a scene in a high degree soothing and consolatory; but with the customary decline of light are now

united the sighing of the coming storm, the eddying of the withered foliage—

For now the leaf
Incessant rustles from the mournful grove,
Oft startling such as, studious, walk below,
And slowly circles through the waving air.
But, should a quicker breeze amid the boughs
Sob, o'er the sky the leafy deluge streams;
Till choak'd and matted with the dreary shower,
The forest walks at every rising gale,
Roll wide the wither'd waste, and whistle bleak.

THOMSON.

"These are occurrences which so strongly appeal to our feelings, which so forcibly remind us of the mutability of our species, and bring before us, with such impressive solemnity, the earth as opening to receive us, that they have, from the earliest period of society, and in every stage of it, been considered as typical of the brevity and destiny of man. Like leaves on trees, says the first and the greatest of all uninspired writers—

Like leaves on trees the race of man is found,
Now green in youth, now withering on the ground;
Another race the following Spring supplies,
They fall successive, and successive rise;
So generations in their course decay,
So flourish these, when those are pass'd away;

a simile which, as originating in the sympathies of our common nature, has found an echo in the poetry of the melancholy Ossian. 'The people are like the waves of Ocean,' exclaims the bard of Cona; 'like the leaves of woody Morven, they pass away in the rustling blast, and other leaves lift their green heads on high.' "

The great business of Nature, with respect to the vegetable creation, at this season, is *dissemination.* Plants having gone through the progressive stages of springing, flowering, and seeding, have at length brought to maturity the rudiments of a future progeny, which are now to be committed to the fostering bosom of the earth. This being done, the parent vegetable, if of the *herbaceous* kind, either totally dies or perishes as far as it rose above ground: if a *tree* or *shrub,* it loses all its tender parts which the Spring and Summer had put forth. Seeds are scattered by the hand of Nature in various manners. The winds, which at this time arise, disperse far and wide many seeds which are curiously furnished with feathers or wings for this purpose. Hence plants with such seeds are, of all, the most universally to be met with; as dandelion, groundsel,

rag-wort, thistles, &c. Other seeds, by the means of hooks, lay hold of passing animals, and are thus carried to distant places. The common burs are examples of this contrivance. Many are contained in berries, which being eaten by birds, the seeds are discharged again uninjured, and grow where they happen to light. Thus carefully has Nature provided for the distribution and propagation of plants.

The gloom of the falling year is in some measure enlivened, during this month especially, by the variety of colours, some lively and beautiful, put on by the fading leaves of trees and shrubs—

Those virgin leaves, of purest vivid green,
Which charm'd ere yet they trembled on the trees,
Now cheer the sober landscape in decay:
The lime first fading; and the golden birch,
With bark of silver hue; the moss-grown oak,
Tenacious of its leaves of russet brown;
The ensanguined dog-wood; and a thousand tints
Which Flora, dress'd in all her pride of bloom,
Could scarcely equal, decorate the groves.

To these temporary colours are added the more durable ones of ripened berries, a variety of which now enrich our hedges. Among these

are particularly distinguished the hip, the fruit of the wild rose; the haw, of the hawthorn; the sloe, of the blackthorn; the blackberry, of the bramble; and the berries of the alder, holly, and woody-nightshade. These are a providential supply for the birds during the winter season; and it is said that they are most plentiful when the ensuing Winter is to be most severe. The Corn Law Rhymer has some fine lines addressed to the Bramble which may be here inserted, although their burden is the flower rather than the fruit—

Thy fruit, full well, the school-boy knows,
  Wild bramble of the brake!
So, put thou forth thy small white rose;
  I love it for his sake.
Though woodbines flaunt and roses glow
  O'er all the fragrant bowers,
Thou need'st not be ashamed to shew
  Thy satin-threaded flowers;
For dull the eye, the heart is dull,
  That cannot feel how fair,
Amid all beauty beautiful,
  Thy tender blossoms are!
How delicate thy gauzy frill!
  How rich thy branchy stem!
How soft thy voice, when woods are still,
  And thou sing'st hymns to them;

While silent showers are falling slow,
  And, 'mid the general hush,
A sweet air lifts the little bough,
  Lone whispering through the bush!
The primrose to the grave is gone;
  The hawthorn flower is dead;
The violet by the moss'd grey stone
  Hath laid her weary head;
But thou, wild bramble! back dost bring,
  In all their beauteous power,
The fresh green days of life's fair spring,
  And boyhood's blossomy hour.
Scorn'd bramble of the brake! once more
  Thou bidst me be a boy,
To gad with thee the woodlands o'er,
  In freedom and in joy.

ELLIOTT.

The common martin, whose nests, hung under the eaves of our houses, afford so agreeable a spectacle of parental fondness and assiduity, usually disappears in October. Although many details of the preparations made by the swallow tribe for migration have already been given, the following account of an emigration on a large scale, which took place in the year 1815, is too pleasantly written to be omitted.

"Early in the month of September, that beautiful and social tribe of the feathered race, began

to assemble in the neighbourhood of Rotherham, at the Willow-ground, near the Glass-house, preparatory to their migration to a warmer climate; and their numbers were daily augmented, until they became a vast flock which no man could easily number,—thousands upon thousands, tens of thousands, and myriads,—so great, indeed, that the spectator would almost have concluded that the whole of the swallow race were there collected in one huge host. It was their manner, while there, to rise from the willows in the morning, a little before six o'clock, when their thick columns literally darkened the sky. Their divisions were formed into four, five, and sometimes six grand wings, each of these filing off and taking a different route—one east, another west, another south, and so on; as if not only to be equally dispersed throughout the country, to provide food for their numerous troops, but also to collect with them whatever of their fellows, or straggling parties, might be still left behind. Just before the respective columns arose, a few birds might be observed in motion at different points, darting through their massy ranks—these appeared like officers giving the word of command. In the

evening, about five o'clock they began to return to their station, and continued coming in from all quarters until nearly dark. It was here that you might see them go through their various aëriel evolutions, in many a sportive ring and airy gambol, strengthening their pinions in these playful feats for their long ethereal journey, while contentment and cheerfulness reigned in every breast, and was expressed in their evening song by a thousand pleasing twitters from their little throats, as they cut the air and frolicked in the last beams of the setting sun, or lightly skimmed the surface of the glassy pool. The notes of those that had already gained the willows sounded like the murmur of a distant waterfall, or the dying war of the retreating billow on the sea beach.

"The verdant enamel of Summer had already given place to the warm and mellow tints of Autumn, and the leaves were now fast falling from their branches, while the naked tops of many of the trees appeared; the golden sheaves were safely lodged in the barns, and the reapers had for this year shouted their harvest-home; frosty and misty mornings now succeeded, the

certain presages of the approach of Winter. These omens were understood by the swallows as the route for their march; accordingly, on the morning of the 7th of October, their mighty army broke up their encampment, debouched from their retreat, and, rising, covered the heavens with their legions; thence, directed by an unerring guide, they took their trackless way. On the morning of their going, when they ascended from their temporary abode, they did not, as they had been wont to do, divide into different columns and take each a different route, but went off, in one vast body, bearing to the south. It is said that they would have gone sooner, but for a contrary wind, which had some time prevailed; that on the day before they took their departure, the wind got round and the favourable breeze was immediately embraced by them. On the day of their flight, they left behind them about a hundred of their companions; whether they were slumberers in the camp, and so had missed the going of their troops, or whether they were left as the rear-guard, it is not easy to ascertain; they remained, however, till the next morning, when the greater part of them mounted on their pinions,

to follow, as it should seem, the celestial route of their departed legions. After these a few stragglers only remained; these might be too sick or too young to attempt so great an expedition; whether this was the fact or not, they did not remain after the next day. If they did not follow their army, yet the dreary appearance of their depopulated camp, and their affection for their kindred, might influence them to attempt it, or to explore a warmer and safer retreat."

The royston, or hooded crow, which migrates northward to breed, returns about the beginning of this month. At the same time the woodcock is first seen on our eastern coasts; though the great body of them does not arrive till November or December. Various kinds of water-fowl, which breed in the northern regions, approach our coasts at this season. About the middle of the month, wild geese quit the fens, and go up to the rye-lands, where they pluck the young corn.

The weather about this time is sometimes extremely misty, with a perfect calm. The ground is covered with spiders' webs innumerable,

crossing the path, and extended from one shrub to another—

> Now, by the cool declining year condens'd,
> Descend the copious exhalations, check'd
> As up the middle sky unseen they stole,
> And roll the doubling fogs around the hill.
> . . . . . Thence expanding far,
> The huge dusk, gradual, swallows up the plain;
> Vanish the woods; the dim-seen river seems
> Sullen, and slow, to roll the misty wave.
> E'en in the height of noon oppress'd, the sun
> Sheds, weak and blunt, his wide-refracted ray;
> Whence glaring oft, with many a broaden'd orb,
> He frights the nations. Indistinct on earth,
> Seen through the turbid air, beyond the life
> Objects appear; and, wilder'd, o'er the waste
> The shepherd stalks gigantic.
>
> THOMSON.

This month is the height of the hunting season. The temperature of the weather is peculiarly favourable to the sport; and, as the products of the earth are all got in, little damage is done by the horsemen in pursuing their chase across the fields—

> All now is free as air, and the gay pack
> In the rough bristly stubbles range unblamed.
>
> SOMERVILE.

It is usually in October that the bee-hives are despoiled of their honey. As long as flowers are plentiful, the bees continue adding to their store; but when these fail, they are obliged to begin feeding on the honey they have already made. From this time, therefore, the hive grows less and less valuable. Its condition is judged of by its weight. The common method of getting at the honey is, by destroying the bees with the fumes of burning brimstone. The humane Thomson exclaims against this practice:—

Ah! see where, robb'd, and murder'd, in that pit
Lies the still-heaving hive; at evening snatch'd
Beneath the cloud of guilt-concealing night,
And fix'd o'er sulphur; while, not dreaming ill,
The happy people in their waxen cells
Sat, tending public cares, and planning schemes
Of temperance, for Winter poor; rejoiced
To mark, full flowing round their copious stores.
Sudden the dark oppressive steam ascends;
And, used to milder scents, the tender race,
By thousands, tumble from their honey'd domes,
Convolved, and agonizing in the dust.
And was it then for this you roam'd the Spring,
Intent from flower to flower? for this you toil'd
Ceaseless, the burning Summer-heats away?
For this in Autumn search'd the blooming waste,
Nor lost one sunny gleam; for this sad fate?

This cruel necessity may be prevented by using hives or boxes properly contrived; or by employing fumes which will stupify but not kill them. In this case, however, enough of the honey must be left for their subsistence during the Winter.

One of the more audible symptoms of the declining year is the shrill, artless note of the robin, as he makes his gradual approach to the dwellings of man, and pours forth his eloquent melody to bespeak the kind offices of humanity during the inclemencies of Winter—

Mild melodist! whose artless note,
  At foggy eve, at chilly morn,
From Nature's quiet haunts remote,
  Here seems a harmony forlorn;
Fain would I give thee, for thy song,
  A carol simple as thy own;
For thou, sweet bird! awak'st a throng
  Of thoughts which rise for thee alone.

It is not that thy lay is fraught
  With music, like the sky-lark's strain,
Or nightingale's so sweetly caught
  By listening ear, in midnight's reign;
Nor has thy note that deeper sound,
  Of which my heart has felt the thrall,

When I have heard, from groves profound,
  The lone wood-pigeon's frequent call.

But these, each one, and all, give vent
  To song, where song is wont to flow;
Thou, thou art sweetly eloquent,
  With nothing near to wake that glow
Of music, in the haunts of men,
  Which, amid buildings cluster'd round,
From time to time arrests my pen,
  And makes me listen to its sound.

BERNARD BARTON.

In most of the wine-countries of Europe, the *vintage* takes place in October. The grape is one of the latest fruits in ripening. When gathered, the grapes are immediately pressed, and the juice is fermented, like that of apples in making cider. A great variety of wines are produced from the different kinds of grapes, and the diversity of climates in which they grow. In England, from the uncertainty of the season, this fruit does not ripen constantly enough to be worth cultivation for the purpose of wine-making.

This month is particularly chosen, on account of its mild temperature, for the brewing of malt-liquor designed for long keeping, which is therefore commonly called *old October*.

The farmer continues to sow his winter-corn during this month; and wheat is frequently not all sown till the end of it. And now begin the labours of the bird-boy—a classical being since the days of Bloomfield—whose duty it is to scare the "hungry woodland foes" from the seed-corn, till it springs and takes root, and is thus secure from the winged inhabitants of the air. When the weather is too wet for sowing, the farmer ploughs up the stubble-fields for winter-fallows. Acorns are sown for young plantations at this time; and forest and fruit-trees are planted.

"The transition from Autumnal richness to the desolation of winter is gradual, gentle, and even beautiful. The nature-loving eye can even be pleased with the last signs of vegetation still hanging upon the branches, or silently dropping to the ground—

> The beauty of decay
> Charms the slow-fading year,
> And sweetly fall away
> The flowers and foliage sere;
> And lingering summer still we see,
> In every half-dismantled tree.

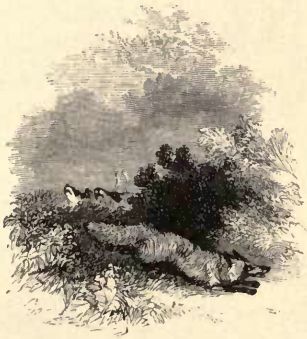
But little singing of birds disturbs the still-life of a day in the close of Autumn; all is silent:

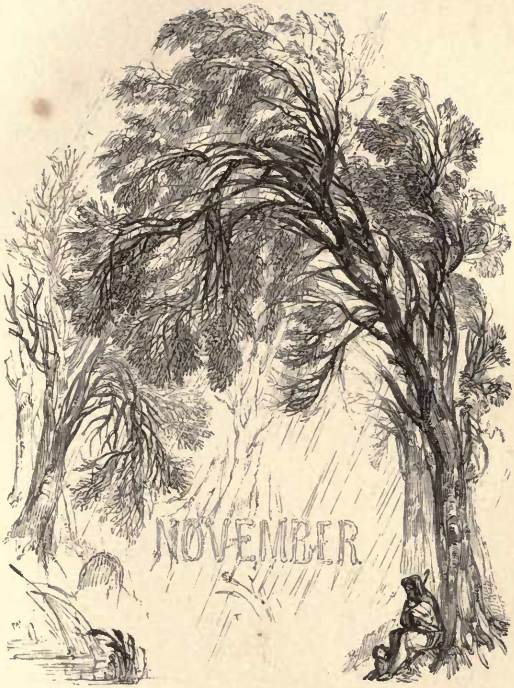
the birds which still remain with us are almost dumb, and seem to feel and mourn the approaching rigours of the season. A few feeble and plaintive notes alone express their sadness, and but for the rousing echoes of the sportsman's gun by day, and the cawing of the blackening train of crows flying home in the twilight to their roost in the distant woods, scarcely a sound would break the death-like and all-pervading stillness."

"October is, undoubtedly, the best month of the year for the pedestrian wanderer," says the author of the 'Botanical Looker-out,' "and it is, therefore, by no means unworthy of the attention of the exploring botanist. The morning opens with all the balminess of Spring, without its bitter blasts—with all the warmth of Summer, without its oppressive glare; sleeping masses of vapour rest in the hollows of the hills, like silver lakes, and the first ray of the rising sun, glancing upon the fading forest, garnishes it with gold, or, resting on some old pear-tree, charms the sight with the richest hues of crimson and carmine exhibited by its foliage. In the height of Summer it is but rarely that any very extensive view presents itself from a lofty eminence in this un-

certain climate, for either a misty glare obscures the distant horizon, and in some quarter or other thunder clouds come whirling about the mountain-side, or, worse than all, drizzling and settled rain overwhelm the disappointed explorer of Nature's beauties. But the calm and often cloudless days of Autumn generally offer opportunities of the most exciting kind, when no wind blows too rough a cadence, and when the heat generated by exertion is not of that debilitating kind before which, as is frequently the case in the dog-days, the enervated frame sinks in passive and overpowering fatigue. It may, however, be thought that, at this late period of the season, but few plants can be met with to give zest to botanical ardour, but this is by no means the case, for in favoured sheltered nooks, among the hollows of the rocks, many alpine plants continue in flower till overpowered by the frosts of November, while the cryptogamous vegetation of the mountains now appear in fine perfection. Ferns of the most delicate structure glisten with a golden green lustre within the dark cavities of the precipice; the lichens stain the sullen rocks with yellow, brown, and purple, or fringe their edges

with a hoary beard, and every bubbling spring is surrounded with an emerald carpet, where the mosses lift up to the observant eye their brown *thecæ*, or urns of fructification, either gracefully adorned with a light *calyptra*, or veil, or covered, as in the *Polytrichi*, with a shaggy hairy cap."





The dead leaves strew the forest-walk,
  And wither'd are the pale wild-flowers;
The frost hangs blackening on the stalk,
  The dew-drops fall in frozen showers,
  Gone are the Spring's green sprouting bowers,
Gone Summer's rich and mantling vines,
  And Autumn with her yellow hours
On hill and plain no longer shines.

BRAINARD.

NOVEMBER.

The Anglo-Saxons, who gave characteristic names to each of the months, designated November *Wint-monath*, or wind-month, "whereby wee may see," remarks Verstegan, "that our ancestors were in this season of the yeare made acquainted with blustering Boreas." They also denominated it *Blot-monath*, or blood-month, and were at this period accustomed to kill abundance of cattle for Winter store.

We are in the habit, in common parlance, of calling this "the gloomy month of November." And undoubtedly, remarks Leigh Hunt, November with its loss of verdure, its frequent rains, the fall of the leaf, and the visible approach of Winter, is a gloomy month to the gloomy, but to others it brings but pensiveness—a

feeling very far from destitute of pleasure. There are many pleasures in November if we will lift up our matter-of-fact eyes, and find there are matters of fact we seldom dream of. It is pleasant to meet the gentle fine days that come to contradict our sayings for us; it is a pleasant thing to see the primrose come back again in woods and meadows; it is a pleasant thing to catch the whistle of the green plover, and to see the greenfinches congregate; it is a pleasant thing to listen to the deep amorous note of the wood-pigeons who now came back again; and it is a pleasant thing to hear the deeper voice of the stags making their triumphant love amidst the falling leaves.

As the preceding month was marked by the *change*, so this is distinguished by the *fall*, of the leaf. This is so striking a circumstance, that the whole declining season of the year is often, in common language, named the *Fall*. There is something extremely melancholy in this gradual process, by which the trees are stripped of all their beauty, and left so many monuments of decay and desolation.

Even the animal creation seem to sympathize

with man in the feelings of melancholy inspired by the decay of Nature—

In pensive guise,
Oft let me wander o'er the russet mead,
And through the sadden'd grove, where scarce is heard
One dying strain to cheer the woodman's toil.
Haply some widow'd songster pours his plaint,
Far, in faint warblings, through the tawny copse;
While congregated thrushes, linnets, larks,
And each wild throat, whose artless strains so late
Swell'd all the music of the swarming shades,
Robb'd of their tuneful souls, now shivering sit
On the dead tree, a dull despondent flock;
With not a brightness waving o'er their plumes,
And nought save chattering discord in their note.

THOMSON.

Intervals of clear and pleasant weather, however, frequently occur; and, in general, the autumnal months are, in our island, milder and less variable than the correspondent ones in Spring. It long continues—

The pale descending year, yet pleasing still.

In fair weather, the mornings are somewhat frosty; but the hoar frost, or thin ice, soon vanishes after sun-rise—

The lengthen'd night elapsed, the morning shines
Serene, in all her dewy beauty bright,
Unfolding fair the last autumnal day.
And now the mounting sun dispels the fog;
The rigid hoar-frost melts before his beam;
And, hung on every spray, on every blade
Of grass, the myriad dew-drops twinkle round.

THOMSON.

High winds frequently happen in November, which at once strip the trees of their faded leaves, and reduce them to their winter-state of nakedness.

There is a fearful spirit busy now;
  Already have the elements unfurl'd
  Their banners; the great sea-wave is upcurl'd;
The cloud comes; the fierce winds begin to blow
About, and wildly on their errands go;
  And quickly will the pale red leaves be hurl'd
  From their dry boughs, and all the forest world,
Stripp'd of its pride, be like a desert show.
I love the moaning music which I hear
  In the bleak gusts of Autumn, for the soul
Seems gathering tidings from another sphere,
And in sublime mysterious sympathy,
Man's bounding spirit ebbs and swells more high,
  Accordant to the billow's loftier roll.

Among our autumnal pleasures ought not to

have been omitted, says Leigh Hunt, the very falling of the leaves—

> To view the leaves, thin dancers upon air,
> Go eddying round.
>
> C. Lamb.

Towards the end of the month, he continues, under the groves and other shady places, they begin to lie in heaps, and to rustle to the foot of the passenger, and there they will be till the young leaves are grown overhead, and Spring comes to look down upon them with their flowers—

> O Spring! of hope and love, and youth and gladness—
> Wind-wing'd emblem! brightest, best, and fairest!
> Whence comest thou, when with dark Winter's sadness
> The tears that fade in sunny smiles thou sharest?
> Sister of joy, thou art the child who wearest
> Thy mother's dying smile, tender and sweet;
> Thy mother, Autumn, for whose grave thou bearest
> Fresh flowers and beams, like flowers with gentle feet,
> Disturbing not the leaves which are her winding-sheet.
>
> Shelley.

The trees generally lose their leaves in the following succession:—walnut, mulberry, horse-

chesnut, sycamore lime, ash; then, after an interval, elm, then beech and oak, then apple and peach trees, sometimes not till the end of November; and, lastly, pollard oaks and young beeches, which retain their withered leaves till pushed off by their new ones in Spring.

Flocks of wood-pigeons, or stock-doves, the latest in their arrival of the birds of passage, visit us in this month.

The salmon now begins to ascend the rivers to spawn. The force and agility which they display in leaping over cataracts and other obstacles to their ascent are very surprising. They are frequently taken in this attempt, by nets or baskets placed directly below the fall, into which they are carried after an unsuccessful leap.

The farmer strives during this month to finish all his ploughing of fallows; and then lays by his implements till the ensuing year.

Cattle and horses are taken out of the exhausted pastures, and kept in the house or yard. Hogs are put up to fatten. Sheep are turned into the turnip-field, or, in stormy weather, fed with hay at the rick.

Bees now require to be moved under shelter; and the pigeons in the dove-house to be fed—

Where now the vital energy that moved,
While Summer was, the pure and subtil lymph
Through the imperceptible meandering veins
Of leaf and flower? It sleeps; and the icy touch
Of unprolific Winter has impress'd
A cold stagnation on the intestine tide.
But let the months go round, a few short months,
And all shall be restored. The naked shoots,
Barren as lances, among which the wind
Makes wintry music, sighing as it goes,
Shall put their graceful foliage on again,
Shall boast new charms, and more than they have lost.
Then each in its peculiar honours clad,
Shall publish, even to the distant eye,
Its family and tribe.

COWPER.

Among the rural sounds and scenes which now strike the ear and the eye of the observer, may be mentioned "the busy flail, which is now in full employment, fills the air about the homestead with a pleasant sound, and invites the passer by to look in at the great open doors of the barn, and see the wheatstack reaching to the roof on either hand; the little pyramid of bright

grain behind the thrashers, the scattered ears between them leaping and rustling between their fast-falling strokes, and the flail itself flying harmless round the labourers' heads, though seeming to threaten danger at every turn; while, outside, the flock of 'barn-door' poultry ply their ceaseless search for food among the knee-deep straw; and the cattle, all their Summer frolics forgotten, stand ruminating beside the half empty hayrack, or lean, with inquiring faces, over the gate that looks down into the village, or away towards the distant pastures."

Now, too, the felling of wood for Winter store commences: and, in a mild, still day, the measured strokes of the woodman's axe, heard far away in the thick forest, bring with their sounds an associated feeling similar to that produced by a wreath of smoke rising from out the same scene, telling us a tale of—

Uncertain dwellers in the pathless woods.

Thus wears the month along, in checker'd moods,
Sunshine and shadows; tempest loud, and calms;
One hour dies silent o'er the sleepy woods,
The next wakes loud with unexpected storms;
A dreary nakedness the field deforms—

Yet many a rural sound and rural sight
Lives in the village still about the farms,
Where toil's rude uproar hums from morn till night,
Noises in which the ears of industry delight.

CLARE.

"With this month," says the author of the "Botanical Looker-out among the Wild Flowers," a delightful work by a practical botanist, which we recommend to the notice of such of our readers as worship in the temple of Flora, and especially to those of the fair sex—"with this month it would almost seem that botanical exploration *must* terminate, yet there is no pause in the operations of Nature, and when a fine day *does* occur, how exhilirating to climb the heathy hills, where the green cup-mosses and silvery rein-deer lichens are putting forth their scarlet or brown tubercles, while, perhaps, on some old weather-beaten stump a *lecidea* appears in fine fructification, never observed before. From the holly-trees, now showing their ruddy berries, and assuming an importance in the sylvan scene they did not before possess, hosts of fieldfares flit as if thrown up casually into the air, while deeper within the wood is heard the harsh scream of the jay. Below the

eye the level country seems wrapt in a cold, dull, impenetrable mantle of fog, a calm but desolate sea of vapour; yet above this stratum the sunbeams light up the hill-side in radiance, and glance upon the green or brown ferns, and, especially where, amidst the intricacies of the crisp bracken, some lonely autumnal flower—perhaps even the harebell—lingers as if it hoped to pass scathless through the coming winter rigours. As the tempest of every night now makes continual progress in clearing of its foliage any hesitating tree that had been permitted thus long to retain it, the landscape assumes new features in many directions, and often, indeed, discloses beauties to the eye, unobserved or unexpected while the cloak of Summer leaves spread so thickly over the country. How often at this period have I been struck with the picturesque aspect of the old timbered farm-house of the true hospitable old English times, with its peaked gables, and wide, lofty, turret-like chimneys, now fully obvious among the leafless orchards around it, and often accompanied by its sober, unvarying companion, the old enduring yew, recalling a thousand recollections of the olden times. The denuded trees

now exhibit palpable signs of the approaching season in the *mistletoe*, with its white berries prominently nestled in many of them; and the trees on which this curious parasite occurs, may now be more advantageously observed than at any other time.

"A stroll among the mossy labyrinths of the wood may conclude the explorations of the year. Here all is silent and mournful, the ground thickly covered with a soft yielding carpet of accumulated leaves, while the tall trunks of the forest trees wave with a thick crop of frondose and filamentous lichens, like the deserted columns of a ruined temple ragged with weeds. Yet here, occasionally, the eye of research is rewarded by observing some rare and curious *fungus*.

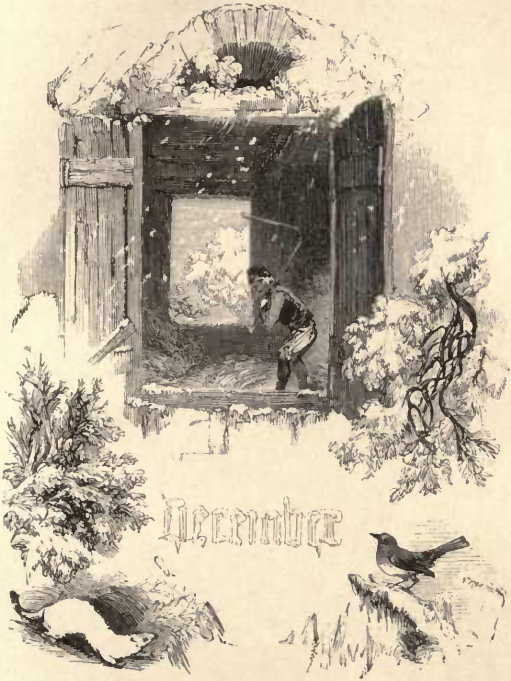
But a pelting storm breaks in upon the studies and delights of the exploring botanist; and beneath some ivied oak, projecting brambly bank, or bower of wild feathery clematis, he is forced to seek a temporary shelter as the howling storm vents its fury upon the darkened landscape. It breaks in pealing uproar upon the forest, and the lofty branches creak and groan around—the deluge falls in one continuous splash upon the

soaked leaves—but lo, a break of light! a sudden impulse hurries the dark squadrons far on, and a brilliant iris starts up irradiant at the foot of the pleased shelterer."

One of the curious phenomena of Winter which is frequently seen this month in marshy places, during moist weather, is the "Jack-o'-Lantern," or *ignis fatuus*, or, as it is called in some parts of the country, "Will-o'-Wisp," scaring the belated traveller, and frightening the timid rustic. Grahame, in his "British Georgics," thus refers to this appearance—

Sometimes November nights are thick bedimm'd
With hazy vapours floating o'er the ground,
Or veiling from the view the starry host;
At such a time, on plashy mead or fen,
A faintish light is seen by southern swains,
Call'd Will-o'-Wisp; sometimes from rushy bush
To bush it leaps, or cross a little rill
Dances from side to side in winding race;
Sometimes with stationary blaze it gilds
The heifers' horns; or plays upon the mane
Of farmer's horse returning from the fair,
And lights him on his way, yet often proves
A treacherous guide, misleading from the path
To faithless bogs, and solid-seeming ways;
Sometimes it haunts the churchyard, up and down

The tombstone's spiky rail, streaming it shows
Faint glimpses of the rustic sculptor's art,
Time's scythe and hour-glass, and the grinning skull;
Sometimes to the lone traveller it displays
The murderer's gibbet and his tatter'd garb,
As lambently along the links it gleams.



Thou hast thy beauties; sterner ones I own
Than those of thy precursors; yet to thee
Belong the charms of solemn majesty
And naked grandeur. Awful is the tone
Of thy tempestuous nights, when clouds are blown
By hurrying winds across the troubled sky.

BERNARD BARTON.

DECEMBER.

We now hail the approach of "dark December"—

Last of the months, severest of them all!

Winter may be now considered as having set in; and we have often violent winds about this time, which sweep off the few remaining leaves from the trees, and, with the exception of a few oaks and beeches, leave the woods and forests nothing but a naked assemblage of bare boughs. "Picture to yourself, gentle reader, one of these blustering nights, when a tremendous gale from the south-west, with rattling rain, threatens almost the demolition of everything in its way; but add to the scene the inside of a snug and secure cottage in the country,—the day closed, the fire made up and blazing, the curtains drawn over a barricadoing of window shutters which defy

the penetration of Æolus, and all his excarcerated host; the table set for tea, and the hissing urn or the kettle scarce heard among the fierce whistling, howling, and roaring, produced alternately or together, by almost every species of sound that wind can produce in the chimneys and door-crannies of the house. There is a feeling of comfort and a sensibility to the blessings of a good roof over one's head, and a warm and comfortable hearth, while all is tempest without, that produces a peculiar but real source of pleasure. Two or three intelligent friends sitting up over a good fire to a late hour, and interchanging their thoughts on a thousand subjects of mystery,—the stories of ghosts, and the tales of olden times,—may, perhaps, beguile the hours of such a stormy night like this, with more satisfaction than they could a midsummer evening, under the shade of trees, in a garden of roses and lilies. And then, when we retire to bed in a room with thick, woollen curtains, closely drawn, and a fire in the room, how sweet a lullaby is the piping of the gale down the flues, and the peppering of the rain on the tiles and windows, while we are now and then rocked in the house as if in a cradle!"

The changes which take place in the face of Nature during this month are little more than so many advances in the progress towards universal gloom and desolation. "It is now complete Winter. The vapourish and cloudy atmosphere wraps us about with dimness and chilliness; the reptiles and other creatures that sleep or hide during the cold weather, have all retired to their Winter quarters; the farmer does little or nothing out of doors; the fields are too damp and miry to pass, except in sudden frosts, which begin to occur at the end of the month; and the trees look but like so many skeletons of what they were—

Bare, ruin'd choirs, in which the sweet birds sang."
SHAKSPEARE.

Barry Cornwall, in one of his earlier poems, thus characterizes Winter—

This is the eldest of the seasons; he
Moves not like Spring, with gradual step, nor grows
From bud to beauty, but with all his snows
Comes down at once in hoar antiquity.

No rains nor loud proclaiming tempests flee
  Before him, nor unto his time belong
  The suns of Summer, nor the charms of song,
That with May's gentle smiles so well agree.
But he, made perfect in his birth-day cloud,
  Starts into sudden life with scarce a sound,
  And with a tender footstep prints the ground,
    As though to cheat man's ear: yet while he stays
    He seems as 'twere to prompt our merriest days,
And bid the dance and joke be long and loud.

And Thomson, with his fine moral sense, has a beautiful application of the decline of the year to that of human life—

'Tis done! dread Winter spreads his latest glooms,
And reigns tremendous o'er the conquer'd year.
How dead the vegetable kingdom lies!
How dumb the tuneful! Horror wide extends
His desolate domain. Behold, fond man!
See here thy pictured life; pass some few years,
Thy flowering Spring, thy Summers ardent strength,
Thy sober Autumn fading into age,
And pale concluding Winter comes at last,
And shuts the scene. Ah! whither now are fled
Those dreams of greatness?—those unsolid hopes
Of happiness?—those longings after fame?—
Those restless cares?—those busy bustling days?—
Those gay-spent, festive nights?—those veering thoughts,

Lost between good and ill, that shared thy life?
All now are vanish'd! Virtue sole survives,
Immortal never-failing friend of man,
His guide to happiness on high.

Cowper describes a forest walk in Winter—

The night was Winter in his roughest mood,
The morning sharp and clear. But now at noon,
Upon the southern side of the slant hills,
And where the woods fence off the northern blast,
The season smiles, resigning all its rage,
And has the warmth of May.——
No noise is here, or none that hinders thought:
The red-breast warbles still, but is content
With slender notes and more than half-suppress'd;
Pleased with his solitude, and flitting light
From spray to spray, where'er he rests he shakes
From many a twig the pendent drops of ice,
That tinkle in the wither'd leaves below,
Stillness accompanied with sounds so soft,
Charms more than silence.

COWPER.

Several of the wild quadrupeds now take to their Winter concealments, which they seldom or never quit during the Winter. Of these, some are in an absolutely torpid or sleeping state, taking no food for a considerable time; others are only drowsy and inactive, and continue to feed on provisions which they have hoarded up.

In our mild climate few become entirely torpid. Bats do so, and retire early to caves and holes, where they remain the whole Winter, suspended by the hind feet, and closely wrapped up in the membranes of the fore feet. As their food is chiefly insects, they can lay up no store for the Winter, and, therefore, must be starved, did not Nature thus render food unnecessary for them. Dormice also lie torpid the greatest part of the Winter, though they lay up stores of provision. A warm day sometimes revives them, when they eat a little, but soon relapse into their former condition.

Squirrels, and various kinds of field-mice, provide magazines of food against Winter, but are not known to become torpid. The badger, the hedge-hog, and the mole, keep close in their Winter quarters in the northern districts, and sleep away great part of the season.

The early vegetables which now flourish are the numerous tribes of mosses, and the lichens, or liver-worts. The mosses put forth their singular and minute parts of fructification during the Winter months; and offer a most curious spectacle to the botanist, at a time when all the

rest of Nature is dead to him. Lichens cover the ditch-banks, and other neglected spots, with a leather-like substance, which, in some countries, serves as food both to men and cattle. The reindeer lichen is the greatest treasure of the poor Laplanders, who depend upon it for the support of this their only species of domestic cattle, during their tedious Winters.

On the twenty-first of December happens the *Winter solstice*, or shortest day; when the sun is something less than eight hours above the horizon even in the southern parts of the island. Soon after this, frost and snow generally begin to set in for the rest of the Winter.

The farmer has little to occupy his attention in the course of this month. His chief care is bestowed on the feeding and management of his cattle, and various matters of household economy. Leaving the care of the seed which he has committed to the earth to the God of Seasons he can, with heart stirring feeling, exclaim—

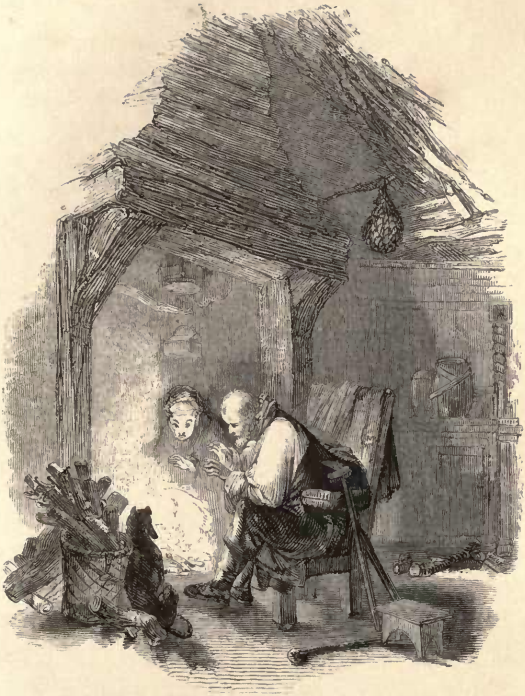
> Have mercy, Heaven! for now laborious man
> Has done his part!

Or, as another and anonymous writer expands the idea—

Have mercy, Winter! for we own thy power,
Thy flooding deluge, and thy drenching shower;
Yes, we acknowledge what thy prowess can;
But, oh! have pity on the toil of man!
And, though the floods thy adamantine chain
Submissive wear—yet spare the treasured grain;
The peasants to thy mercy now resign
The infant seed—their hope, and future mine.

The festival of Christmas occurs very seasonably to cheer this comfortless period of the year. Great preparations are made for it in the country, and plenty of rustic dainties are provided for its celebration according to the rites of ancient hospitality. Thus the old year steals away unremarked and unlamented; and a new one begins with lengthening days and brighter skies, inspiring fresh hopes and pleasing expectations:—

These as they change, Almighty Father, these
Are but the varied God. The rolling year
Is full of Thee. Forth in the pleasing Spring
Thy beauty walks, Thy tenderness and love.
Wide flush the fields; the softening air is balm;
Echo the mountains round; the forest smiles;
And every sense, and every heart is joy.
Then comes Thy glory in the Summer months,
With light and heat refulgent. Then Thy sun
Shoots full perfection through the swelling year:



WINTER.

To-night how changed the scene! his iron mood
Stern Winter has resumed; how wild, how rude
Drives the fierce blast along; the sky, how dark!
How fast the snow-flakes fall; and hark—oh, hark!
"The floods lift up their voice!" But whilst without
All is mad revelry and savage rout,
Within let all be cheerfulness and mirth.

THE WINTER NOSEGAY.

And oft Thy voice in dreadful thunder speaks:
And oft at dawn, deep noon, or falling eve,
By brooks and groves, in hollow whispering gales,
Thy bounty shines in Autumn unconfined,
And spreads a common feast for all that lives.
In Winter, awful Thou! with clouds and storms
Around thee thrown, tempest o'er tempest roll'd,
Majestic darkness! on the whirlwind's wing,
Riding sublime, Thou bid'st the world adore,
And humblest Nature with thy northern blast.
Mysterious round! what skill, what force divine,
Deep-felt, in these appear! a simple train,
Yet so delightful, mix'd with such kind art,
Such beauty and beneficence combined;
Shade, unperceived, so softening into shade;
And all so forming an harmonious whole;
That, as they still succeed, they ravish still.

THOMSON.

We have watched the year from its birth to its decline,—have arrived at the dreary season of its old age,—and stand near the edge of its grave. We have seen the bright, brilliant, and evanescent glories of early Spring, the rich sunshine of Summer, and the sweet but mournful twilights of Autumn, with their solemn inspirations, give place to the short days and gloomy evenings which usher in the Winter solstice. One by one the fair faces of the flowers

have departed from us; and the sweet murmuring of "shallow rivers to whose falls, melodious birds sing madrigals," has been exchanged for the harsh voice of the swollen torrent, and the dreary music of winds that "rave through the naked tree." Through many a chilling sign of "weary winter comin' fast," we have at length reached the consummation of the whole—

For lo! the fiery horses of the sun,
Through the twelve signs their rapid course have run;
Time, like a serpent, bites his forked tail,
And Winter, on a goat, bestrides the gale;
Rough blows the north-wind near Arcturus' star,
And sweeps, unrein'd, across the polar bar.

The halcyon days, which sometimes extend their southern influence even to our stern climate, and carry an interval of gloomy calm into the heart of this dreary month, have generally, ere its close, given place to the nipping frosts and chilling blasts of mid-winter. "Out of the south" hath come "the whirlwind, and cold out of the north." The days have dwindled to their smallest stature; and the long nights, with their atmosphere of mist, shut in and circumscribe the wanderings of man. Clouds and shadows surround us. The air has

lost its rich echoes, and the earth its diversified aspects; and to the immediate threshold of the house of feasting and merriment, we have travelled through those dreary days which are emphatically called "the dark days before Christmas." Of one of the gloomy mornings that usher in these melancholy days, Ben Jonson gives the following dismal description—

It is, methinks, a morning full of fate!
It riseth slowly, as her sullen car
Had all the weights of sleep and death hung at it!
She is not rosy-finger'd, but swoln black!
Her face is like a water turn'd to blood,
And her sick head is bound about with clouds,
As if she threaten'd night, ere noon of day!
It does not look as it would have a hail,
Or health wish'd in it—as of other morns!

And the general discomforts of the season are bemoaned by old Sackville, with words that have a wintry sound, in the following passage, which we extract from "England's Parnassus"—

The wrathfull Winter 'proching on apace,
With blustering blast had all ybard the treene,
And old Saturnus with his frosty face,
With chilling cold had pearst the tender greene;
The mantle rent wherein inwrapped beene
The gladsome groves that now lay overthrowne,

The tapers torne, and every tree downe blowne;
The soyle, that erst so seemely was to seeme,
Was all dispoil'd of her beauties hewe,
And stole fresh flowers (wherewith the Sommer's queene
Had clad the earth), now Boreas' blast downe blew;
And small fowles flocking, in their songs did rew
The Winter's wrath, where with each thing defast,
In woefull wise bewayl'd the Sommer past:
Hawthorne had lost its motley liverie,
The naked twigs were shivering all for cold,
And, dropping downe the teares aboundantlie,
Each thing, methought, with weeping eye me told
The cruell season, bidding me withhold
Myselfe within.

The feelings excited by this dreary period of transition, and by the desolate aspect of external things to which it has at length brought us, would seem, at first view, to be little in harmony with a season of festival, and peculiarly unpropitious to the claims of merriment. And yet it is precisely this joyless condition of the natural world, which drives us to take refuge in our moral resources, at the same time that it furnishes us with the leisure necessary for their successful development. The spirit of cheerfulness which for the blessing of man is implanted in his nature,

deprived of the many issues by which, at other seasons, it walks abroad, and breathes amid the sights and sounds of Nature, is driven to its own devices for modes of manifestation, and takes up its station by the blazing hearth. In rural districts, the varied occupations which call the sons of labour abroad into the fields are suspended, by the austerities of the time; and to the cottage of the poor man has come a season of repose, concurrently with the falling of that period which seals anew for him, as it were, the promises of eternal rest. At no other portion of the year could a feast of equal duration find so many classes of men at leisure for its reception—

> With his ice, and snow, and rime,
> Let bleak Winter sternly come!
> There is not a sunnier clime,
> Than the love-lit Winter home.

Amid the comforts of the fireside, and all its sweet companionships and cheerful inspirations, there is something like the sense of a triumph obtained over the hostilities of the season. Nature, which at other times promotes the expansion of the feelings, and contributes to the enjoyments of man, seems here to have promulgated her fiat

against their indulgence; and there is a kind of consciousness of an inner world created, in evasion of her law—a tract won by the genius of the affections from the domain of desolation—spots of sunshine planted, by the heart, in the very bosom of shadow—a pillar of fire lit up in the darkness! And thus the sensation of a respite from toil, the charms of renewed companionship, the consciousness of a general sympathy of enjoyment, running along all the links of the social chain, and the contrasts established within to the discomforts without, are all components of that propitious feeling to which the religious spirit of the season, and all its quaint and characteristic observances make their appeal. There is, too, (connected with these latter feelings, and almost unacknowledged by the heart of man,) another moral element of that cheerful sentiment which has sprung up within it. It consists in the prospect, even at this distant and gloomy period, of a coming Spring. This is peculiarly the season of looking forward. Already, as it were, the infant face of the new year is perceived beneath the folds of the old one's garment. The business of the present year has terminated; and along the

night, which has succeeded to its season of labour, have been set up a series of illuminations, which we know will be extinguished, only that the business of another seed time may begin. Neither, amid all its dreary features, is the natural season without its own picturesque beauty, nor even entirely divested of all its Summer indications of a living loveliness, or all suggestions of an eternal hope. Not only hath it the peculiar beauties of old age, but it hath, besides, lingering traces of that beauty which old age hath not been able wholly to extinguish, and which come finely in aid of the moral hints and religious hopes of the season.

The former—the graces which are peculiar to the season itself—exist in many a natural aspect and grotesque effect, which is striking both for the variety it offers, and for its own intrinsic loveliness—

We may find it in the wintry boughs, as they cross the cold blue sky,
While soft on icy pool and stream the pencil'd shadows lie;
When we look upon their tracery, by the fairy frost-work bound,
Whence the flitting red-breast shakes a shower of blossoms to the ground.

The white mantle which the earth occasionally puts on, with the rapidity of a spell, covering, in the course of a night, and while we have slept, the familiar forms with a sort of strangeness, that makes us feel as if we had awakened in some new and enchanted land—the fantastic forms assumed by the drifting snow—the wild and fanciful sketching of old Winter upon the "frosty pane"—the icicles that depend, like stalactites, from every projection, and sparkle in the sun, like jewels of the most brilliant water; and, above all, the feathery investiture of the trees above alluded to, by which their minute tracery is brought out with a richness, shaming the carving of the finest chisel, are amongst the features which exhibit the inexhaustible fertility of Nature in the production of striking and beautiful effects. Hear how one of our best poetesses, Mary Howitt, sings of these graces—

One silent night hath pass'd,—and lo!
How beautiful the earth is now!
All aspect of decay is gone,
The hills have put their vesture on,
And clothed is the forest bough.

Say not 'tis an unlovely time!
Turn to the wide white waste thy view;

Turn to the silent hills that rise
In their cold beauty to the skies;
And to those skies intensely blue.

* * * *

Walk now among the forest trees;—
Said'st thou that they were stripp'd and bare?
Each heavy bough is bending down
With snowy leaves and flowers—the crown
Which Winter regally doth wear.
'Tis well—thy Summer garden ne'er
Was lovelier with its birds and flowers,
Than is this silent place of snow,
With feathery branches drooping low,
Wreathing around the shadowy bowers!

But the season hath other striking aspects of its own. Pleasant, says Southey—

To the sober'd soul,
The silence of the wintery scene,
When Nature shrouds her in her trance
In deep tranquillity.
Not undelightful now to roam
The wild-heath sparkling on the sight;
Not undelightful now to pace
The forest's ample rounds,
And see the spangled branches shine,
And snatch the moss of many a hue,
That varies the old tree's brown bark,
Or o'er the greystone spreads.

Mr. Southey might have mentioned, too, as belonging to the same class of effects with those produced by the mosses "of many a hue" that "vary the old trees' brown bark," those members of the forest which retain their dead and many-tinted leaves till the ensuing Spring, hanging occasional wreaths of strange and fantastic beauty in the white tresses of Winter; together with the rich contrast presented by the red twigs of the dog-wood, amid the dark colours of the surrounding boughs. The starry heavens, too, at this period of the year, present an occasional aspect of extraordinary brilliancy; and the long Winter nights are illustrated by a pomp of illumination, presenting magnificent contrasts to the cold and cheerless earth, and offering unutterable revelations at once to the physical and mental eye.

Amongst the traces of a former beauty not utterly extinguished, and the suggestions of a Summer feeling not wholly past away, we have those both of sight and of sound. The lark, "all independent of the leafy Spring," as Wordsworth says, has not long ceased to pour his anthem through the sky. In propitious seasons, such as we have enjoyed for some years past, he

is almost a Christmas-carol singer. The China roses are with us still; and, under proper management, will stay with us till the snow-drops come. So will the anemones and the wall-flowers; and the aconite may be seen to come, long "before the swallow dares, and take the winds of *January* with beauty." The cold air may be kept fragrant with the breath of the scented coltsfoot, and the lingering perfume of the mignionette. Then we have rosemary, too, "mocking the Winter of the year with perfume,"—

> Rosemary and rue, which keep
> Seeming and savour all the Winter long.

"It looks," says Leigh Hunt, pleasantly, "as if we need have no Winter, if we choose, as far as flowers are concerned." "There is a story," he adds in Boccacio, of a magician who conjured up a garden in Winter time. His magic consisted in his having a knowledge beyond his time; and magic pleasures, so to speak, await on all who choose to exercise knowledge after his fashion." But what we would allude to more particularly here, are the evergreens which, with their rich and clustering berries, adorn the Winter season—

offering a provision for the few birds that still remain, and hanging a faint memory of Summer about the hedges and the groves. The mistletoe with its white berries, the holly (Virgil's acanthus) with its scarlet berries and pointed leaves, the ivy whose berries are green, the pyracanthus, with its berries of deep orange, the arbutus, exhibiting its flowers and fruit upon adjacent boughs, the glossy laurel and the pink-eyed laurestine (not to speak of the red berries of the May-bush, the purple sloes of the black thorn, or others which show their clusters upon leafless boughs, nor of the evergreen trees—the pine, the fir, the cedar or the cypress), are all so many pleasant remembrances of the past, and so many types to man of that which is imperishable in his own nature. And it is, probably, both because they are such remembrancers of what the heart so much loves, and such types of what it so much desires, that they are gathered about our doors, and within our homes, at this period of natural decay and religious regeneration, and mingle their picturesque forms and hopeful morals with all the mysteries and ceremonies of the season.

It may be neither unseasonable nor unuseful to

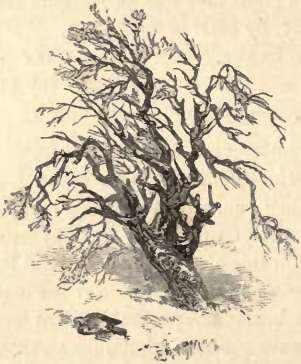
close our pleasant record of the seasons and their change with a few verses from a volume entitled "The Magic Fountain, and other Poems," by Robert Story—

Another year, another year,
O! who shall see another year?
— Shalt thou, old man, of hoary head,
Of eye-sight dim, and feeble tread?
Expect it not! Time, pain, and grief,
Have made thee like an Autumn leaf,
Ready, by blast or self-decay,
From its slight hold to drop away—
And some sad morn may gild thy bier,
Long, long before another year!

Another year, another year,
O! who shall see another year?
— Shall you, ye young? or you, ye fair?
Ah! the presumptuous thought forbear!
Within this churchyard's peaceful bounds—
Come pause and ponder o'er the mounds!
Here beauty sleeps, that verdant length
Of grave contains what once was strength:—
The child—the boy—the man are here:
Ye may not see another year!

Another year, another year,
O! who shall see another year?
—Shall I, whose burning thirst of fame
No earthly power can quench or tame?

Alas! that burning thirst may soon
Be o'er, and all beneath the moon—
All my fine visions, fancy-wrought,
And all this vortex-whirl of thought—
For ever cease and disappear,
Ere dawns on earth another year!



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